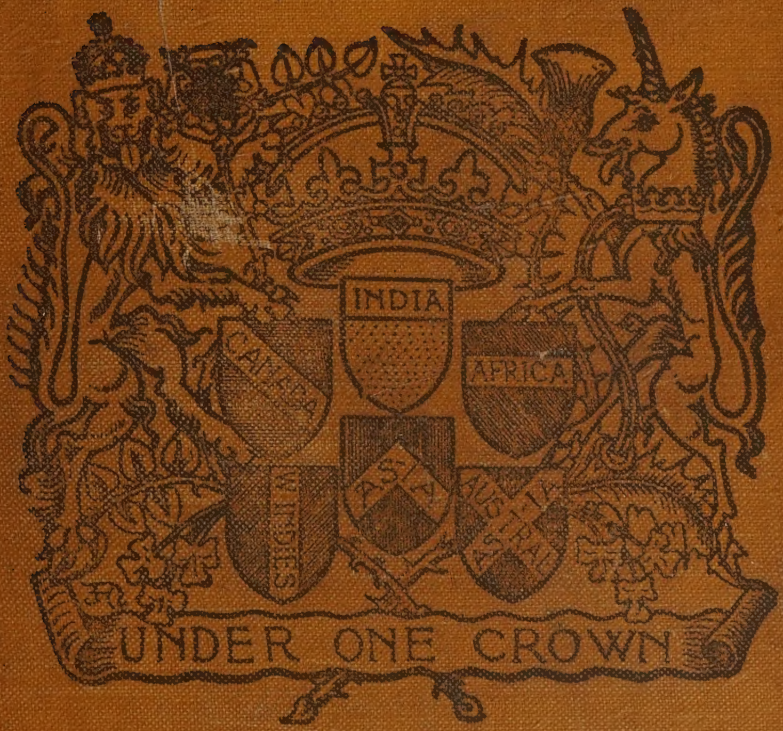
WASTED FIRES

Author's Edition



Hume Nisbet

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WASTED FIRES.

BY

HUME NISBET.

NOTE.—*The Sketch, from which this romance was carefully re-written and re-arranged, appeared twelve years previously under the title of "Ashes."*—H. N.

From *The Daily Chronicle*, August 18th, 1902.

CHARACTER AND ACTION.

"WASTED FIRES."

The novel that reveals in artistic combination both the delineative art and the art of expressing character in action, is by no means frequently produced in these days. More usual is it to find that the one kind of action—when both are in any measure present—prevails over the other. Then the novelist's observation and insight may be such as show no ordinary study of human character, yet the story will suffer a languid or spiritless action. Or, on the other hand, the strength of the novel may lie wholly in the story, which will hold us captive by the buoyancy and brilliancy of the action, while the characterisation is of the thinnest, and leaves us totally unimpressed.

Mr. Hume Nisbet shows a high quality in his command of these dissimilar and commonly disunited excellences. He deals with modern conditions, with life as it is, or with "things as they are" (to use the Godwinian phrase). We can congratulate him on his success in this very different order of fiction. His principal characters are drawn with a sure hand, and with a vitality that individualises each one with his own distinction. At the same time the author displays all his wonted powers of invention and suggestion in the fertility of resource that marks the movement of his story.

"Wasted Fires" keeps the conscientious reader alert by the variety and profusion of the hero's adventures. There is a good deal of "black and white" in Mr. Nisbet's story. On the other hand, there is much human nature in it, and well observed human nature, too. The unity of the story is skilfully preserved, and the two streams of narrative are made to blend in a natural sequence.

Mr. Nisbet must have drawn his pictures of Australian life from personal knowledge of that country. He describes the condition of life in the bush and the desert waste, as in the township and runs, with admirable vividness. Altogether "Wasted Fires" is full of cleverness, and a good example of the novel of character and action.

The Scotsman : "Mr. Nisbet knows Australia well, and wields a graphic and powerful pen."

The Athenæum : "We can unreservedly praise the Australian part of the book."

Daily Graphic : "Hume Nisbet's romance of Australia and England comes along with less advertisement than many another novel, but for careful workmanship and excellence of descriptive matter it is ahead of the majority. In the person of the artist hero the author has created a character well worth studying. His description of the mental and physical condition of his hero, verging upon madness through overwork, is a very powerful and striking piece of work, and would alone make the book notable."

Daily Mail : "A forcible tale forcibly told."

Daily Express : "A highly readable and interesting story, told vigorously and with much colour."

Pall Mall Gazette : "A rousing story, a good tale, and an hour or so spent in reading it will be less wasted than many hours of human life are."

Morning Post : "One of the best he has written."

Public Opinion : "Reminds one of Greek tragedy. It is a powerful narrative."

Christian Leader : "Mr. Nisbet has done striking original work both as artist and author. This book contains some clever character sketches."

Scottish Leader : "Mr. Nisbet has produced two or three very lively books of adventure, in which he reveals considerable individuality of thought and keen appreciation of the beauties of nature. This book is clever, and by no means lacking in interest."

Manchester Examiner : "Mr. Nisbet writes in a very interesting manner."

Academy : "A powerful story—there is reality as well as realism in it."

Dundee Advertiser : "A very stirring story."

Queen : "There is pathos as well as indication of practical experience in the book."

St. James' Gazette : "The adventures in Australia are exciting and well told."

WASTED FIRES.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

BAIL UP

THE BUSHRANGER'S SWEETHEART

A SWEET SINNER

CHILDREN OF HERMES

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AUTHOR'S EDITION

WASTED FIRES

A ROMANCE OF AUSTRALIA AND ENGLAND

NATIONAL FICTION RESERVE SCHEME
DO NOT DISCARD

BY

HUME NISBET

The Sketch from which this romance was carefully re-written and re-arranged, appeared previously under the title of "Ashes."

FRONTISPIECE AND VIGNETTE BY THE AUTHOR.

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EXPLANATORY PREFACE.

The last edition of this work, "Wasted Fires," was *withdrawn from sale*, by the publishers, because the Author had omitted to mention that he had published twelve years previously a study, entitled "Ashes," from which this work had been compiled.

The Author does not wish to intrude on his readers any longer explanations of this incident, nor of its unfortunate consequences to himself. If, however, these publishers desire that the transactions should be made public, he is quite prepared and willing to gratify them. Meantime he begs his readers to regard the following pages as pure romance, so far as the acting puppets are concerned, with a background and scenery, drawn carefully from Nature. Regard the misfortunes of the hero, as imaginary quite as much as his unexpected good fortune. In real life such dramatic events do not occur; at least they must be phenomenal if they do.

THE AUTHOR.

1904.

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WASTED FIRES

PROLOGUE

IN THE WOODS

IT is a fair night, with the breeze blowing balmy and soft through the woods, and that faint aroma of mould wafting from the ground, presagement of a summer storm.

Delicious June, with the young leaves rustling and whispering about the secrets which they cover; with noises

> 'like of a hidden brook
> In the leafy month of June,
> That to the sleeping woods all night
> Singeth a quiet tune.'

The moon, nearly at her full, coquetted with the clouds, and filled them with mellow, prismatic tints. When she was hidden behind the mauve-grey mist, all round became lustrous with soft combinations of yellow, rose, green, and purple; each colour blending yet distinct, like tender washes over silver fretwork. This radiant sky-picture showed the more precious from being framed by the slender birch branches and whispering leaves.

A low and distant muttering of thunder rumbled at times, while near the horizon broke flashes of wildfire. The sound and gleaming were not disturbing; for, like the general picture, they were subdued, threatening the future only, and adding a thrill to the present.

It was a magical night for 'Love's young Dream,' and the lovers that now enjoyed it were exceptionally favoured in their surroundings. They were alone, as far as they knew. The sward under their feet was unworn. The fragrant wild

rose, eglantine, and wood flowers perfumed the charged air, sighing over them like sweet breathings. A languorous melancholy filled the covert and clung to their attuned hearts. Love is robbed of many charms, when it has to wander through the crowded hard streets and feet-worn parks of a city. In the country it finds its proper surroundings: spreading wolds, shady bird-thronged groves, and murmuring brooks.

They had been walking, the lover and his lass, for some time under the branches. Through the meadows they had passed from the village where she lived, and he lodged. A long walk it might have been considered by town-bred people; but nothing to a young landscape-painter and a country girl, both in love.

By narrow footpaths they had wandered, and through high-hedged lanes, meeting the lowing kine returning to their byres in the mellow gloaming; along the bank of the broad and swiftly flowing river, meeting a few belated fishers, as the darkness crept slowly over the landscape; through a hedge-gap and over a heath and gorse-covered moor; then into the long birch wood, where at last they felt in a world all their own.

They were still moving onward, although the birch wood was nearly past, and a sombre fir forest lay before them like a black patch. In the open they had walked side by side, hardly touching. In the wood she had taken his arm and crept nearer to him. She was very close now as they neared the last of the silver trunks and approached the sable fir grove.

For the past hour they had spoken hardly a dozen words. What he had to say seemed too difficult even in that dim, uncertain light. They had come to a crisis in their love affairs, and he meant to face it, and have it over before they parted. She likewise felt what was coming, and her heart was heavy with vague dread. The lurid flashes and the low rumbling of thunder seemed portent of her mental unrest.

With a shiver she glanced round while they were still among the light trees, and said—

'There's a storm coming, Dirk. We had better get back.'

Dirk Davelock looked over his shoulder carelessly, and answered—

'The storm is a long way off, Nell. Let us walk on a little farther before we turn.'

Saying which he put his arm round her waist, and drew her unresistingly over the patch of open ground and under the pitchlike boles of the firs. It was dark enough now for his courage. Pausing, he drew her head to his breast and whispered in her ear—

'I have waited a year for you, Nell, hoping that your people would relent, but I can endure it no longer. The past six months have been too filled with misery for us both. Say, lass, you will end it and come with me.'

'I would do it this moment only for your sake. My home is no longer a place for me, but I cannot become a burden to you.'

'Never a burden, Nell, my darling. Without you my career as a painter is over, for I cannot work under this suspense. I want you, Nell, and I cannot live without you.'

'Will you be able to live with me, Dirk? A wife is a great expense.'

'Not my wife, if you are the one. My work is getting known, and with you I shall be able to work hard and make extra exertions. Besides, it is impossible for you to stand this antagonism at home much longer.'

'No—I have already advertised for a situation.'

'In preference to me, Nell?'

'No, Dirk. You know that could not be, only——'

'What, Nell?'

'I am so afraid lest *you* rue the step once it is taken. As my mother says truly, you need a rich wife, not a poor one, to help you on, and—and it would be wise to wait a little longer.'

He stopped her reasons with his kisses and passionate embraces. He swept her fears away with reasons which her fond heart could neither resist nor answer until he had conquered. Then he took the mastery.

'Come with me to-night—now, Nell. We are close to the station, and the next train will soon be due. Let me take you, as you are, to my cousin's house in town. She will look after you till we can be married.'

'What would she think of me if I plunged upon her like this?'

'She knows all about our troubles, and is ready to be a sister to you. I'll send a wire from the station, and she will be fully prepared to receive you. Come, Nell, it means happiness and life to me.'

'No—no, Dirk. I cannot to-night. Next week perhaps, if they don't relent at home.'

'Come, Nell, now.'

'I cannot, Dirk. Don't ask me, dearest, to come now. Let us go back.'

His reply was another shower of kisses as he drew her farther into the forest. He held her firmly, poured out words of love without giving her a chance of protesting, and led her on.

'Hurry, darling, or we shall be wet. The rain is beginning, and we must get out of this before the storm bursts.'

It was time they hastened, for the raindrops were pattering overhead, while the thunder was rumbling nearer and louder. The flashes also were becoming more pronounced.

Through the forest they went rapidly, her forebodings crushed by the more potent fears of the lightning. She clung to him now for protection, and resisted no longer.

Had there been a wait at the station she might have turned back even then, but as they reached the ticket-office they found it open. Still holding her, Dirk got the tickets, and in a minute more she was seated beside him in the carriage.

'That's right, my darling!' cried Dirk Davelock as the train glided from the little station. With a cry of dismay his future wife flung herself into his arms, and burst out crying.

Their journey had commenced.

BOOK FIRST

FOG

CHAPTER I

A VAMPIRE FRIEND

'METALTOWN.

'DEAR SIR,—Your proposal concerning this work has been received, and is now under consideration. I may tell you that the same idea had already been contemplated by the firm some time ago, but at that period had to be laid aside. If you can give us a definite and practical plan how it should be gone about, please call upon me at your earliest convenience.—Yours faithfully,

'MOLOCH, Art Editor
'(GRABBLESON AND CO.).'

'At last I 've got a chance,' cried Dirk Davelock as he held the letter for his wife to read. 'Just in the nick of time, Nell. I shall once more see Australia and the warm sunshine, once again get my blood heated, and feel while I work that there is some return for all the hard effort, something for you and the children.'

'And we shall be left alone. Ah, Dirk, is there no other way to keep us except by leaving us and risking your life?'

'Nonsense, dear, my life will be all right, and what other way have we left that does not lead to starvation? Ask our old friend, Mr. Melgarf—that 's his knock, punctual as usual in his visits and as comforting as the three friends of Job condensed into one. Let him in, Nell, for I suppose I am too sanguine to night, and he will correct all that for me.'

Mrs. Davelock went out to the door and admitted their weekly visitor, Mr. Melgarf.

'Well, and how are things going along since I saw you both last?' asked the visitor, after he had taken from his overcoat his pipe and tobacco-pouch, fixing a pair of cold, stone-coloured eyes upon the husband and wife.

'I have had a letter from Messrs. Grabbleson and Company respecting the foreign tour I told you about last week.'

'Favourable, I hope, for your own sake, Dirk, although, with the really first-class talent going idle about this wonderful city, and the number of clever applicants which there are sure to be——'

'It is my own project, Mr. Melgarf.'

'Yes! yes, of course, of course—but—however, let me see what they say, and I'll be better able to judge of your having the ghost of a chance.'

Dirk groaned in his inmost spirit. Already the usual cold douche had begun to play down his shivering back.

He was an old man, this weekly comforter, how old it would be difficult to guess; a spare, thin figure, with a shrivelled, wrinkled face, hard in expression, whiskers and hair grizzly and harsh, and eyebrows over-pent and shaggy.

There was about him the look of great age, a cold and unsympathetic age, and his eyes were of that colourless, yet penetrating light-grey into which no one could see beneath the surface; a grey old man with a bleak November air about him which was depressing at the outset, and which gathered in gloom like a London fog the longer one stayed in his company, until the spirits drooped and became languid under the compromising and deadening influence.

He was always punctual in his times of call, to the day and hour which he had himself appointed, and waited the number of hours which he had fixed to wait. His time was in this manner planned out day after day without variation, either to himself or the people he chilled with his dreary presence.

He was never too ill to come to his friends; in fact, he had never been confined to his bed in his life, and no inconvenience which he may have caused ever made him shorten his visits by as much as a quarter of an hour. There was a living and youthful vitality about him also which seemed to

gain in power as the energy and hope left those who entertained him, as if he had some occult gift of appropriating and using the vitality which they were losing.

His inclinations led him to choose young people as companions, and as they grew wearied and jaded he became fresher and more vivacious in his manner, so that Dirk and his wife noticed that while he came into their company grey and bloodless, he departed with active pace and a flush upon his cheeks, although never with a warmer light in those wall-like eyes.

He indulged in the habits and tastes of youngsters: went to theatres and music-halls, enjoyed the gas-lit streets of a night, took his drink at bars as they took theirs, and could smoke with the most inveterate. Possessed of an independent fortune, he led the ordinary life of a young man about town, indefatigable, with a face which seemed to have long passed over the limits of man, upon which Death may have looked and gone by, seeing stamped there a special permit and reservation for some other fate than the fate of mankind.

Dirk and his wife both noticed that the day after he had been with them was a day of languor and idleness, like the day after a late party. To write a letter even seemed too great an effort; while it took them generally about thirty-six hours to recover tone.

The hours he spent with them were spent in smoking and uttering discouraging remarks on his part, and a painful effort of talking on theirs; perhaps it was this which wore them out so much. He sat down to listen, filling and emptying his pipe without intermission, and passively forcing them to unbosom themselves of all their projects, hopes, and fears, which seemed to be poured out as the sea-waves pour themselves upon a rocky coast. He suggested nothing, and they never felt the better of these unwilling confidences.

Some imaginative or superstitious people believe in good and bad luck. Dirk was almost forced into credence of this superstition, in spite of his ordinary good sense and constant struggles against what he could not but regard as a folly, by the after-effects of these visits.

After a visit from Mr. Melgarf, the projects which he had almost regarded as settled in a satisfactory manner fell through and ended in disappointment; indeed, so often had this

result come to pass that he would forgo an engagement, or put off an application, if met by his friend, or else reckon for certain upon a direct 'No.' Several times, when he had a business engagement for the next day, he would put out the lights and go to bed, where they could listen to the old man knocking at the front door.

So far had this superstitious horror taken possession of them that the sight of his card, inserted in the letter-box when he was not admitted, was enough to give them a fit of the blues. Dirk would not touch it on these occasions, but would, with a hasty letter of apology for his rudeness, plead an unavoidable business engagement, and then look forward to the next week's infliction, praying that something might be settled definitely before the day came round. It was a weekly nightmare which they could not get rid of; for no shut door offended him. He appeared in the name of friendship, and they had to endure it as best they could: one of the many unavoidable obligations of civilisation.

'Why did I let him in?' thought poor Dirk, as he lit his pipe and watched the old man adjust his spectacles and prepare to peruse the letter. The fatal gas had done it, for they had expected this letter for the past three days; so much depended upon it in their present straitened circumstances that they had waited up for the postman, and so been caught.

'Well, what do you think of it?' asked Dirk, while his wife sat silent at the other side of the table with closely clasped hands, as the old man silently folded it up, and, taking off his spectacles, slowly began to fill his pipe.

'It would not be a bad thing for you, if it comes to anything—*and you could do it*—but as I said——'

'Oh, I can do it, never fear. I know the country as well as you do Prig Street.'

'Yes, I dare say that 's all very fine, but there are so many men of first-rate ability—oh, wonderfully clever fellows, who are starving in this wonderful city of bricks, and who will all be eager to do it also—well-known and tried men.'

'But this firm knows my work also; they have already approved of it.'

'Yes, yes, perhaps'—a long pause, filled out with heavy puffs of smoke—'however, I have not come to discourage

you; it may be all right in the end; let us hope so, for your sake.'

'Yes, I want both hope and encouragement badly,' responded Dirk in a bitter tone.

'Don't you think it will be very hard if Dirk has to leave us, Mr. Melgarf?' said Mrs. Davelock, with a miserable look in her rich brown eyes.

'Yes, it will be hard.'

'And wicked for husband and wife to have to part?'

'It is a bitter world, Mrs. Davelock, for the poor. I don't know anything worse than to have no money or no prospects, and there is no harder place to live in than Metaltown for the man of mediocre talents; a wonderful place, though, for the few who succeed—that is, for the really talented.'

'Yes, I suppose so,' said Dirk.

'Oh, a wonderful city, where one may live a lifetime and not know one quarter of it, for the miles and miles of piled-up bricks are amazing.'

'So are the successful men.'

'They are. You know Robert Telmore, quite a young man, and such a clever dog, he sold a picture the other day for five hundred pounds, about the size of that *thing* over there—*five hundred pounds!*'

'He had plenty of influential friends, I suppose?'

'Oh, hosts, hosts, but he has also a private income. Ah, he is a marvellously clever fellow.'

'Just so. Do you like his pictures?'

'Well, *no*, I can't say that I do like them.'

'Not much in colour or drawing, eh?'

'He is very faulty in both, I believe.'

'And slovenly in his way of working?'

'He is; in fact, I don't quite see the meaning of some of his pictures; but then they sell, you know, and he is talked about, and so, as he is successful, he must be talented. What is it you have got over there?'

Dirk rose and brought the picture to the light, and held it up before his friend, who did not trouble to put on the glasses to examine it.

'How do you like it?' asked Dirk, who waited patiently for a long time, while the old man turned his grey eyes upon the canvas, and smoked solemnly, without making a remark.

'A seascape, I notice.'

'Yes, some fishing-boats in a calm.'

'Oh!'

Dirk replaced the picture with its face to the wall, and resumed his pipe.

'Nell, will you sing us something?'

'Yes, do,' said Mr. Melgarf in an indifferent tone, and poor Nell, with a choking lump at her throat, opened the piano and began to play and sing, the two men sitting opposite one another, and smoking hard all the while.

She played, and turned the leaves over for herself; for her husband representing the great majority of unsuccessful, therefore mediocre, men, Mr. Melgarf felt there was no necessity to exert himself for her, and Dirk was at the moment too much occupied in reflecting upon his own incapacity to notice what she was doing.

'Thanks,' absently remarked the ancient guest when she had finished, emptying his pipe on to the ash-tray laid there for the purpose, and proceeding to fill up once more; while the singer, seeing as little enthusiasm over her song as there had been over her husband's picture, left the piano, and once more took her place at the table.

'I was at a West-End concert the other night, got up in aid of the "Convalescent Home," and heard *that* song rendered really beautifully.'

'One of the great singers, I suppose?' asked Mrs. Davelock calmly.

'No, she was the wife of one of our greatest builders, a millionaire, a wonderfully successful man. I don't think I ever saw such a handsome set of diamonds in my life as the set she wore on that occasion.'

Mrs. Davelock, who had hitherto rather fancied that she possessed the vocal gift, having a rich, full soprano voice, carefully trained by the best masters, felt now that both herself and the critics who had praised her before were at fault and gross flatterers when she heard about the lady with the diamonds. She felt humbled and properly wretched, as their unprosperous position deserved, that she had ventured to bore this kind friend with her commonplace style.

Silence fell over the group, while the room gradually grew dense with smoke, as the comforter began to lose his ghastly

pallor and the flush came into his face, while the host and hostess became wan and wearied as the timepiece on the mantel ticked out the lagging moments.

A white tom-cat sprang on to the table at this pause in the conversation, and, arching his back, purred as he rubbed his soft sides against the dark, downcast cheeks of his mistress. The children were all in bed and sleeping, but at this moment the wail of a waking baby was heard upstairs.

'There is the baby!' cried out Mrs. Davelock, with a look of relief in her eyes. 'I hope you will excuse me leaving you, Mr. Melgarf.'

'Certainly, I must be going soon myself.' He glanced at his watch. 'Half-past eleven; I can wait another ten minutes.'

'Good-night, then, if I do not come down before you go.'

'Good-night.' She held out her hand, which he took without either rising or taking his pipe from his mouth, after which she went out, leaving them together, the old man becoming rejuvenated and the young man looking older by years than before they had met that night.

The ten minutes passed slowly as the two men puffed at their pipes, with a passing word now and then. 'Snodjy,' the white cat, now that his mistress had gone, devoted himself to his master, who, as he stroked him down, seemed to get a little comfort from the contact of flesh and fur.

It looked at the visitor with its yellow eyes, but did not offer to go near him, and when, at last, the ten minutes had expired, and he rose to put on his coat, the cat followed them both out to the lobby, still rubbing against his master's legs and purring loudly.

'I'll be back next week to hear how you get on with Mr. Moloch.'

'Thank you, Mr. Melgarf.'

'Only don't build upon it, you know; Metaltown is so full of disappointments.'

'No, I'll try not to build upon it.'

A beautiful starry night it was into which the old man briskly walked with a jaunty step, his stick sounding on the pavement as if three heels were ringing along, and the young man watched him as he receded, buttoning up his overcoat.

'Come in, puss!' he cried to the cat, as he stood with the door in his hand; but puss had some work to do before he entered.

Slowly he smelt the ground where the sturdy feet of the departed visitor had planted their impress, going over them to the gate and trailing his bushy tail along them as if to wipe out something which he knew in his cat-wisdom to be evil. Then he returned and went through some cat-spell against the doorposts, where the overcoat had touched; a long operation it was, during which his master looked with interest while he waited for it to be finished.

'That's right, "Snodjy," wipe out the bad luck if you can.'

As Dirk spoke 'Snodjy' sprang from the doorway into his arms, and held on to his breast all the while he was shutting up the door, purring loudly and contentedly as if he felt quite satisfied with his labours for that night.

CHAPTER II

A YEAR IN METALTOWN

DIRK DAVELOCK, with his wife and family of five children, dog, cat, and starling, had experienced one year of Metaltown life.

Dirk had come up to Metaltown filled with confidence, as so many have come before him, thinking that he was not unknown nor unappreciated, seeing that his provincial work both with brush and pen had been favourably noticed by the acknowledged authorities of art and literature, and that he had but to proffer his work in this wider field to find ready purchasers.

He brought with him as vouchers sufficient notices and reviews from town and country newspapers and magazines, besides private opinions from the critical magnates, to have made a good-sized volume in themselves, all favourable enough to have been reprinted in full without the asterisks of omitted sentences so often seen in reprinted reviews.

In fact he felt, as he landed at the Central Station, as if he had already won fame, and only came here to gain the reward—fortune.

One Metaltown editor had written to him often, strongly advising him to come up to where his talents would find proper recognition and remuneration. This editor had published several of his articles in his magazines, and had posted him many eulogies from other papers upon these articles as they appeared, regretting only that while feeling grateful for them, it was out of his power to send him any pecuniary return, but when he came up to the 'Metropolis' that he need have no fear; he himself had landed with ten pounds only, and he would introduce him where he could.

Dirk therefore felt no fears about the future, for a friend

had advanced him one hundred pounds to start him on his new career, ten times more than his editorial friend had begun with, and he had a just confidence in his double gift of painting and writing.

He left his family behind until he could get a house for them, so after a hasty breakfast at a coffee-house near, he began his search.

First he went to the office of a young friend and admirer of his and made an appointment for the afternoon, as the friend knew and suggested a good locality to stay in, and kindly offered his services to help house-hunting.

Dirk mostly liked doing things by himself, but the turmoil and din of the great city had got into his brains on this first day, so that he felt helpless, dazed, and incapable of thinking, therefore gratefully accepted his young countryman's offer.

Having an hour or two of waiting, he thought that he would best spend it by calling upon his editorial friend, who had an establishment in the west; so partly to make time pass, and partly through economy, he resolved to walk the distance.

Along the business portions of the city, through the square dedicated to glory, along the art-centres he passed westward, where, finding it farther off than he had supposed, and seeing a local 'bus pause near him, while the conductor held up his hand, he advanced quickly to step upon it.

'Quick, sir! wot are you a-standing there for?' cried out the conductor roughly, for Dirk had stopped half-way, all of a sudden, and was looking behind him, with his hand pressing the calf of his left leg as if in great pain.

'I am trying to see who threw the stone at me.'

'No one, sir; come on!' and Dirk hobbled, and with great difficulty drew himself up to a seat.

The pain grew excessive as they went along, with a sensation as if his leg were cut and bleeding.

'I am sure some one threw a lump of sharp stone or coal and hit me as I was crossing the street,' he said as he sat holding the part.

'No, sir, for I was looking all the time; but if it is bad, I'll stop at the first chemist's shop and you can find out what is the matter.'

'I wish you would,' groaned Dirk, who could hardly bear the pain.

In a few moments they stopped, and Dirk, trying to get out, found that he could not put his injured leg to the ground, but had to hop on the other one into the druggist's shop.

The chemist looked for a moment very ponderous and solemn as Dirk rolled up his trousers, surprised himself to find no trace of a blow.

'Ah! very serious case, sir; shouldn't wonder if you lost that limb; it is an internal injury; you will have to go to the hospital.'

A chill of horror struck Dirk as he heard this verdict. Alone in Metaltown, and such a catastrophe in store. He grew blind for a moment, while the place swam round and a cold sickness settled upon his heart, as all the dire consequences flashed before him.

'Here, sir, take this and let me send for a cab.'

Dirk drank off the *sal-volatile*, while the boy brought a cab to the door of the shop.

'How much?' gasped Dirk, fumbling in his pocket.

'Seven-and-sixpence, sir,' responded the chemist.

Dirk paid him with half a sovereign and received the change.

'Where to?' asked the cabman.

He remembered that his afternoon appointment was for the King's Viaduct, so he directed him to drive there and wait. No use bothering the editor just now, as it was now past hospital hours, and the chemist did not volunteer any information as to how he was to proceed to get in. With a provincial shyness he did not think of asking him any more questions in case he might have to change another gold piece of his borrowed money, so he thought it best to go and get his countryman's advice.

After an hour of waiting at the viaduct he saw his friend coming briskly along, and beckoning him in, told him his trouble.

'Best take a quiet lodging for to-night, and see a doctor to-morrow,' advised his friend, who accompanied him on his journey, and after about three hours' searching found the place he thought would do.

Dirk's faculties were now becoming clearer during the drive, and he remembered amongst his correspondents an M.D.; remembering also his address, he wrote a note inviting him to call next day; this he gave to his friend to post; after which he went off to bed feeling very gloomy with this first day's experience of city life.

An expensive day and a bad start on the road to fortune.

Next day he was no better, but as there seemed to be no chance of getting any one to attend to him, he managed to crawl over the bed and dress himself. There was no mark upon his skin, yet he could not put his foot to the ground without the most exquisite agony, while the feeling that perhaps he would be lamed for life appalled him and kept him in a very gloomy state of mind.

At last he managed to get downstairs to the sitting-room, where he found a cup laid, and shortly afterwards the landlady appeared with his teapot and a rasher of bacon.

She did not inquire about how he felt, nor display any curiosity about his accident, only asked what he would like for dinner, and after a little pause informed him that if convenient it would be more satisfactory to her if he paid for his week's lodgings in advance, as this was her rule with gentlemen 'as brought no luggage.'

This did not tend to raise the spirits of Dirk, even although he owned the justice of it. He had come from a place where, if the people were accused of being hard in driving bargains, and cold, yet they were not so suspicious of strangers, and were more kindly in their manner towards them.

'It will require hard cash if one has to live in Metaltown,' thought Dirk to himself as he gave directions about his dinner, paid his week in advance, and asked if she had any one she could send for his boxes.

'Yes, sir,' the landlady replied, 'my husband can go after his work to-night, only he will 'ave to take a cab there and back, and get something for his time lost.'

'Ask him to do so, please, and let me know what it comes to.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'I am expecting a friend to lunch; will you have something ready for two?'

'Yes, sir.'

The landlady disappeared, and Dirk looked round his room, clean and meagrely furnished, with white lace-curtains and crotchet-work tidies on every chair, imparting a general air of cold stiffness, order, and bareness; there was nothing that any dishonestly inclined lodger would care to make away with.

He had never met the doctor whom he sat expecting, but had been upon intimate correspondence with him for more than two years on subjects of health reform and other matters connected with the benefiting of humanity, so without mentioning his trouble he had merely informed him that he was in town and asked him to call.

'Perhaps I ought to have asked him professionally; however, I can apologise to him when he comes, although I don't suppose he will regard me as a patient; that's the worst of asking a friend's advice, one doesn't like to suggest paying.'

Dirk did not like to take a favour from any one without some return, and sat puzzling his mind greatly how he could the most delicately approach the fee subject with his medical friend.

At twelve o'clock the doctor arrived, and after introducing themselves to each other, Dirk told about his accident and the chemist's opinion, which caused the young doctor to laugh very heartily.

'Ah, that's nothing; you have merely snapped a very small tendon in your leg, a most uncommon accident, yet I have had three cases of it this year already for the first time since I started practice. All you have to do is to give it a rest for a fortnight; on the third week you'll be able to hobble about, and be quite better in twenty-one days.'

Dirk breathed freely once more, while his friend went on—

'You thought some one had struck you, didn't you?'

'Yes.'

'That's just like my last patient. He was passing down a street at the time when the tendon snapped with the same sensation, but being of a hasty disposition he turned about, and seeing only a most respectable old gentleman close behind him with a malacca cane, which might have been an air-gun, he promptly struck out and knocked him down.

'Consequence, the old gentleman gave him in charge for the assault, which a policeman close by had witnessed.

'At the police-station, to which he had to be half carried, he made his charge, and to corroborate it turned up his trousers, but there was no mark nor blemish to show what he was suffering; and as they were about to commit him he thought upon me, and sent off at once.

'When I arrived and saw the state of affairs, I explained as I have done to you, upon which my friend looked exceedingly sheepish at the pair of black eyes which he had given to this unoffending old gentleman.

'"I suppose you don't want to make a case of this now that I have explained?" I said to the injured party.

'"Certainly not, seeing that it was not done out of malice," returned the old gentleman, ruefully touching his damaged optics.

'My friend apologised, with many expressions of regret for his hasty temper and mistake, and the old gentleman told him "not to mention it, for it was nothing," so we all came out of the police-station the best of friends.'

'A polite old gentleman that,' observed Dirk, laughing, 'to call a pair of damaged eyes and a knock-down nothing.'

'Very,' returned the doctor. 'But you'd be astonished how very polite some people are in Metaltown sometimes, and the reverse.'

This matter being settled to Dirk's satisfaction, they now began speaking about their prospects. Both were young men and beginning the struggle, and had much in common to talk about.

Dirk told more of his affairs than the other, who questioned rather than revealed, and at length, after lunch, he rose to depart.

Then Dirk approached the subject which, I dare say, they had both been thinking upon during the interview.

'You'll excuse me, I know, doctor, if I ask you now to consider this as a professional visit, and myself strictly as your patient.'

'Certainly, certainly,' responded the doctor with cheerful alacrity.

'How much——'

'Well, I don't suppose you are in a position to give much any more than myself—say half a guinea.'

Dirk gave a little gasp as he drew out his purse. He had once given half a guinea to a specialist in his native city, and felt it dear at the time, the ordinary fee for professional visits there ranging from one shilling to half a crown, next he felt ashamed of his sheepish provincial delicacy and sensitiveness, to have imagined that any city friendship could be offended at the offer of money or payment.

As he regarded the doctor's smiling, cheerful countenance and outstretched hand, which closed over his fee and fare, he remembered with disgust his own clownish folly once, when a friend had offered to buy a twenty-guinea picture from him, and the remorse he had felt in accepting five pounds from him for it, even though he had first refused fifteen from a dealer for the same picture.

'Metaltown is a wonderfully educative place, I begin to think,' he muttered to himself as he bade his medical friend good-bye, and sank back on the hard antimacassar-covered sofa to ruminate on his own prospects and the idle fortnight before him.

CHAPTER III

THE HOUSE IN METALTOWN

THE house had been taken in a quiet part of Metaltown, a fifty-pound rent with taxes to match.

A nice house, with a good frontage, and garden back and front, of four flats, the under one dark and damp, a perfect paradise for black beetles. All newly painted, particularly on the outside, with drains in the usual leaky and bad condition.

The first trouble which Mrs. Davelock experienced, after getting in, was from a deluge of milkmen. The knocker went from morning to night, while cards lay upon the lobby floor like a heavy shower of snow, and before her bewildered brain could grasp the difficulty, she had committed herself to about two dozen of these milk-decocting adventurers.

Then wild battles took place at the front door amongst the can-depositors, who each claimed the precedence of the other, until Dirk settled the matter by deciding that the best fighting-man should have his custom, seeing that there was no difference in the mixtures of ochre and whitewash which they called 'Alderney' nursing-milk.

A bold, young Yankee boy in heavy sea-boots won the victory, and held the door eventually against the other enemies. He appeared for the first week or two with a face plentifully adorned with bits of sticking-plaster, and of many colours from violet to greenish-yellow, but at last the sea-boots with which he had drifted from his native land cleared the way, and they had peace from this one particular nuisance.

Being an exile in a strange land like themselves, and equally hated by the natives, Mrs. Davelock rejoiced that he had come off victor, and endured the stuff which his

master made up in the dairy backyard without too much grumbling, for the sake of this bold young hero.

He had also, like themselves, many fits of depression, and confided to her sympathetic ears the hourly battles which he had to fight for his hard living with the candidates for his post and the many rivals of his master. His post entirely depended on his sales, and for the sake of his nationality his master did not view him with much favour; his hand, like the pirates on the high seas, was against every man, and his life a constant series of excitement, danger, and action.

'There is no living here for a stranger,' he would say, 'and if I could only save my passage back, I would go home again. A little fighting is nice enough, but all fighting and no rest gets a bit tiresome.'

This was in his depressed moments; but at other times he would come up with the light of battle flaming in his bold blue eyes, and a nose three times its natural size.

'I have just fought three great hulking men round the corner who wanted to take my can from me.'

'And beat the cowards, I hope?' asked Mrs. Davelock.

'Yes, mum. Here's my can all safe and sound, and not a drop lost.'

Then Mrs. Davelock would for the moment forget her own troubles and bestow upon him a trifle towards his passage-hoard.

Butchers, bakers, greengrocers, oilmen, fishmongers, charwomen, and servants wanting places besieged this place constantly, so that by night Mrs. Davelock felt dead-tired-out with replying to the door.

'We must have a girl, Dirk, if only to answer the everlasting knocks.'

They tried a number of small girls first. Some left of their own accord, taking as much as they could carry with them; others had to be sent away for ways and habits of their own; still things did not get on any 'for'arder.'

'We must have a young woman, even if we have to pay more, Dirk; I am sick of these young ones.'

So a young woman was admitted to the establishment - a native of 'Oirland,' with a stolid countenance and a substantial figure. She had been recommended by the

laundry-woman with whom she lodged, and not until herself and her small box had been safely installed in one of the upstairs bedrooms did this fated family know the meaning of discomfort. Before that great event they had thought themselves unhappy, but now they knew it for a certainty.

Mary was the daughter of a gentleman-farmer in the 'ould counthry,' so, at least, she told them, and had never been accustomed to work or 'dirthy' her hands before she came to Metaltown, but for all that she could make herself useful, and was accomplished in all that a woman need learn who was wanted either as a cook, laundry-maid, nurse, or lady's companion.

'In my last place I was treated as one of the family, and had my glass of port wine and my biscuit every forenoon with the misthress.'

Mrs. Davelock told her that she could not afford the glass of wine, but that she would make her one of the family, in proof of which she gave her one of the best bedrooms and let her join in the family meals.

Mary declared herself quite 'contint,' and vowed that she would never leave them all her natural life if she could help it, 'unless I get married, ma'am, you know.'

Mary's first feat in cooking was a plum-dumpling for the children.

'I'll make it big enough for the whole of us, ma'am, for there's no use bothering making more than one dish at a time, and I want to help yez to save your money.'

'She's going to be a treasure, Dirk,' whispered Mrs. Davelock; 'an economical young woman.'

'But I don't care much for plum-dumplings,' responded Dirk.

'Never mind, so long as we save money.'

'All right,' and Dirk went into the room which he had converted into a studio and began his labours for the day.

He got interested in his work and did not notice the flight of time; he had many things to occupy his mind, not the least of which was his rapidly diminishing funds. Metaltown did not quite wear the same hopeful aspect which it had done on the first morning of his landing. During the three weeks of his illness he had written to some of the friends to whom he had got introductions, and amongst

others to his editorial friend, to announce his arrival, but with a single exception not one of them had replied.

The one exception had been Mr. Melgarf. When Dirk got his legs firm and his house into order, he had gone to call upon this editor, and found that he had gone away without leaving his address; and although Dirk had written and called often at the office where the paper was published, he never even saw his friend nor got any response; and as his letters were not returned, he knew that they must have been received.

Another man on whom he had also depended, who had been a life acquaintance of his father's, and who had received many benefits from him as boy and man, was now in a good position, and influential, having a large practice as a successful barrister, joined the majority of unresponsive ones and treated his letters with silent contempt. He did not call upon him personally, having had enough from the visits to the editorial office.

The third was a great artist who in his struggling days had received money and commissions from his father.

'He will be sure to help you by his influence,' said his father, 'if ever you need it, for I assisted him.'

This great artist also ignored his attempts at friendship.

The next was the editor of a fashionable magazine published by the firm of Grabbleson and Co. He had only met him once himself, but he had done some kindness to his wife and sister, and considered that he had done enough to be fairly well received.

This literary lion was out, or rather engaged, when he called with a packet of his drawings and manuscript for inspection, so he left them, with a line, saying that he would call again during the hour when this lion received applicants to his den.

When next he called the office-boy said, 'Is your name Davelock?'

'Yes!' replied Dirk.

'There's a parcel of drawings and manuscript the editor left for you to take away; he told me to tell you that they were no good.'

'Will you kindly take my card in and ask the editor to see me?' said Dirk with a stern air.

The boy went, and returned again almost immediately.

'The editor cannot see you; he is engaged, but you are to take away your things.'

'Did he deliver that message to you, boy?'

'Yes.'

The boy leered with a malicious grin on his sallow face as he took up the packet and held it out.

Dirk looked for a moment as if he intended to storm the citadel, then recovering himself with an effort, said—

'Thank you, my boy.'

He took up his packet and went out. So much for his fame, his volume of reviews, the charities he had done, the times he and his wife had been sat upon by this editorial lion's lioness, the cash he had paid when she vowed that she left her purse at home, the plausibility of this lion when he had visited him, praised his work, and invited him to call upon him if ever he came to Metaltown.

'And this limping jackal writes poetry — sentimental poetry,' muttered Dirk as he strode down the office-stairs and out to the street with a mist of hot blood before his eyes. He starved once in a garret, until friends took pity on his bodily infirmities and helped him into his present post, lived upon his wife's friends, when his pen could not get him bread, slunged, skulked, and lied, to treat me thus!'

Mrs. Davelock and the children hadn't a very pleasant time that night when he came home from this jackal's den with his damaged drawings and dirtied manuscript, for when he opened them out he found that the editor had evidently indulged himself and the office-boy with a merry dance, as there were marks of iron boot-nails and crutch-points all over them.

But Dirk had gained experience; if he had lost some trust in humanity by all this, he had learned that he must depend upon himself and not upon friends, or flatterers, and that on the whole, although it was stealing the youth, and faith, and hope from him and his wife, it was giving them something else, which, if not so good, would serve them in better stead with the strangers, that is if they could steel their hearts and brains hard enough to benefit by the harsh lessons.

Still they bestowed alms and mistaken kindnesses upon the impostors who hourly thronged their door or met them

with piteous faces in the streets. There are some pliable fools whom no experience can harden, who will be victims to the end of the chapter, laughed at, mocked at, and imposed upon, while they have breath left, while the brassy ones ride over them on triumphal cars.

When he had put his house in order, and set up his finished pictures, he issued circulars, and inserted advertisements for pupils in painting, for he meant to neglect no means to keep the pot boiling, if it could be done; but week after week had passed, while he waited and worked, and his young wife rose early and cleaned his house, and then took her children out to walk on the common; without avail, no patrons had called to see the pictures, and no pupils had applied for lessons.

He had written to Mr. Melgarf with the others, and Mr. Melgarf, who had only had a slight intimacy with his people, and did not know his circumstances at first, called. Dirk had enclosed with his letter a favourable notice from one of the greatest critics and philosophers in the English-speaking world; and Mr. Melgarf naturally considered that such a great man would not have given a favourable verdict upon any one who was not of some consequence, *i.e.* who had not an independent income. Mr. Melgarf always reasoned upon his own standpoint and astute knowledge of the world.

Dirk had taken that first visit as a pure visit of kindness, and felt gratified accordingly.

This weak vein of gratitude in Dirk's character had ruined his artistic and literary career more often than he in his innocence thought. He was always striving to show his gratitude, and wearying people who had no claim upon him with his gifts, cheapening his own talents, which they had already bought too cheaply, until they considered that to take them was granting him an additional favour, and despised him and what he did accordingly.

But although his present circumstances were not what Mr. Melgarf on his first visit supposed them to be, still he had prospects in the uncertain future of being all that the old gentleman thought he was. An old and miserly cousin, with a yearly income of between five and eight thousand pounds, only stood at present between him and this fortune, to which he was heir-at-law, but as this cousin was a tough customer

and might easily outlive his heir-at-law, this hope did not count for much. Indeed, Dirk, like Esau, would very gladly have sold his future chances for a fifth part of his destined income, if he could have handled it in the present, and it could have been arranged to mortgage these dead men's shoes. For, in spite of all his rebuffs, he felt confidence enough in himself to know that if he lived long enough he would be independent of this future, which was only a mockery in the present. The miser cousin grudged himself even the ordinary necessities of life to increase his income, and would not help his heir by so much as even a letter of introduction.

Dirk looked round on his pictures ready for sale, and thought upon his decreasing funds and this curmudgeon of a cousin savagely. There was no help to come from him or from any of their united and wealthy relations. They had all made that plain, and the kind friend who had already trusted him could not be imposed upon longer, unless Dirk saw his way clearer. Altogether it was a gloomy outlook, with nothing but rocks ahead, which he was glad to push from him for a little while and lose himself in his present subject, the picture he was working upon, while Mary got ready the plum-dumpling.

Mr. Melgarf, under the impression that he was coming to see a young man with an independent income, came with proportionate respect. He had even persuaded his mighty brother the West-End physician to accompany him so far upon his journey, and then with proper caution had left the great one in a quiet hotel near, round the corner, while he made his visit of investigation, as he did not wish to commit the family respectability too far while there was a doubt in the matter.

He had come in respectfully enough with his hat in his hand, yet careful not to look at nor admire any picture too particularly. It was to be a visit of friendship only, as he plainly let them both see by placing his chair where his back would be towards the pictures.

Dirk with pardonable vanity tried to draw his notice to one or two pictures during the conversation, but the old man was not to be had that way. He had passed through too many studios to commit himself by a remark either good, bad, or

indifferent, until he had proved the exact motive of their coming to Metaltown.

That first interview passed off very well, although Dirk thought him an unappreciative sort of fellow, and felt a little dampened under the influence of his cold grey eye. He did not, however, stay long, but apologised for his hurried visit, as he had left his brother waiting for him; and although Dirk wondered why they both had not come to see his pictures, he made no remark.

'You will have to join a club,' he remarked, and Dirk innocently said he would, 'if that was the right thing to do.'

'He must have an income to take it so easily,' thought the old man, and left them with a warm hand-shake, to make his report to the great one round the corner.

The result of this impression was, that Dirk received in a few days an invitation to a bachelor's dinner to meet some good people. He went and saw the brother and his son, a very languid sort of society young man who had been educated into that gentle state of placidity which could not be moved by an earthquake, so much desired by young men whose fathers can afford to let them take their ease and wear long hair.

This languid youth could do pretty well everything, *a little*, but seldom exerted himself unless very much pressed by an overpowered and gratified company; then he yielded gracefully and with rather a sad air of kindliness to oblige his implorers by shining.

His modesty and condescending kindness were so excessive that Dirk felt the lately mended tendon twitch as if the leg meant kicking, while an insane desire filled his being to try to do what an earthquake could not—rouse up this benevolent Admirable Crichton into something like the vigour of early manhood, an impulse which, however, he prudently restrained.

The father was a mighty man in form as in fortune. He puffed himself out and expanded over the guests, while his brother, the host, wriggled and led the laughter over his ponderous jests and old-world anecdotes.

The other visitors were literary and artistic, but Dirk saw at a glance that the medical giant and his languid son were

the most important pair at the table. He felt rather shy, and was exercised in his mind to observe that he was regarded by one and all as the third person of importance at the party, and could not help feeling as if in some unconscious way he was an impostor, with a wish to put himself a little more in the background, but which he found impossible.

After dinner, when they had retired to the smoking-room, one of the gentlemen began to speak to him.

'My friend Melgarf tells me that you would like to belong to a club.'

'Yes,' replied Dirk, 'I would.'

'I'll put you up for mine if you like.'

'Thank you,' said Dirk, and the affair was settled.

'By the way, have you ever tried Grabbleson and Co. with your work?' asked his new friend, and Dirk at once told him his experience. 'I know the fellow, a beast of a cad, but I'll give you a letter to the art editor, Moloch. He is a personal friend of mine, and will do anything to oblige me; besides, it will do you no harm if I mention how the other fellow treated you, for they hate each other, "as most men do in Metaltown."'

To-day Dirk has paid his subscription and entrance-fee to the club, twelve guineas in all, and possesses a West-End mansion with a host of liveried servants, leaving himself with hardly enough cash to carry on his house for another fortnight at the rate they are going.

The tax and rate men have also been with arrears left by some former tenant, which have swamped him still further, so that as he works, smokes, and thinks, he does not notice the rapid flight of time.

'Please, sorr, the missis sent me to see if you would not like a glass of beer and a bit of bread and cheese, while the dumpling is getting ready.'

Mary appears with a face and figure plentifully powdered with flour.

'Halloa, Mary, two o'clock? is the dumpling not ready yet?'

'Not quite ready, sorr.'

'But it will soon be, eh?'

'Yes, sorr.'

'Oh, then I'll wait.'

'I think, sorr, you 'd better not; it may be an hour or two, you know, for it 's a big wan.'

'All right,' remarks Dirk. 'Then I 'll have a snack, as you suggest.'

Mrs. Davelock brought up the refreshments herself, and was altogether in a very much flustered condition.

'It 's awful, Dirk!' she gasped, as she sat down on one of the studio chairs.

'What is, Nell?'

'The dumpling; she has used over two shillings' worth of flour, raisins, and currants, and sugar enough to have provided a baker with his Christmas stock; messed the whole kitchen, and burnt already more than a quarter of a ton of coals, I am sure.'

'Why don't you interfere and stop it?'

'I dare not; she is mistress of the position, and won't be interfered with.'

'Oh, hang that; I 'll go down and see what she is up to.'

Dirk flung down his palette and brushes, and ran down to the kitchen, followed by his bewildered wife.

Mary received them both smilingly.

'Have yez come to hear about the dumpling?'

'Yes, Mary; how is it getting on?'

'First-class, then, it is, although I had a hard job to get it squeezed into the pot. Mistress, you must get a bigger pot next time.'

It was an immense washing-pot which the cook pointed at triumphantly, and which stood over a fire choked up with coals, while the smoke came out in dense volumes.

'You have forgotten to draw the damper, Mary,' observed Dirk, going over and pulling it out.

'Sure, an' I did think there was something the mather with the vent; botheration on these closed-in affairs, they are always going wrong; but never mind, sorr, you 'll see a dumpling when it is done, that will save all your money for a month to come.'

'Are we to have dumpling for a month, Mary?' asked Dirk quietly.

'That 's to say if you don't eat it all up to-day, which I don't think you will. You see, ma'am, the beauty of a big dumpling is that ye can always kape it, eat it cold, and fry

the slices with a thripple of dripping, an' when there is a young family as yours is there's nothing like it.'

'Well, Mary, suppose you leave the pot to boil now by itself, and go upstairs and sort up the bedrooms a little. I'll take the children out for a walk while you are getting things tidied up; it will soon be night, you know.'

'To be sure, ma'am, you'll take your walk, and I'll make the house tidy.'

Dirk went back to his studio thoughtfully, while Mrs. Davelock took the five children out for a walk, along with the sheep-dog; the youngest in the perambulator.

He had, however, barely settled into his work when the door opened, and Mary once more appeared, this time with her broom and slop-pail in her hands, which she set down in the middle of the floor, and, taking one of the chairs, sat down behind Dirk and his picture.

'Don't be disturbed in your work, sorr; I have just come in to see how you are getting on, I'm so fond of pictures.'

It was the first appreciative audience which Dirk yet had in Metaltown, and still he was not grateful.

'But the bedrooms, Mary, are they done?'

'Not yet, sorr, but they will be; oh, I'm the moighty quick worker when I wance make a start, don't you be afraid of that.'

As it was Mary's first day, Dirk did not like to be too stern, so Mary sat and told him all about the splendours of her family in Oirland, until, chancing to look out of the window, she sprang up saying—

'Sure an' it's the mistress wid the darlints and the dog come home. I'll go and let them in, and by that same token, I think the dumpling ought to be about ready.'

It was at the fashionable hour of six that Mary announced that the dinner was on the table, and taking her place as a friend of the family beside the master, waited with triumphant expectancy on the general verdict.

'It has not swelled much since it went in, Mary,' observed Mrs. Davelock, looking at the smoking monster.

'No, ma'am, it fitted itself to the pot, for, sure, if it had swelled an inch, it would have busted us all up.'

Dirk seized his knife and fork, and made a desperate lunge at the dumpling, which stood the onslaught like adamant.

'Sure an' it seems a stiff wan, sorr,' observed Mary; 'try it again, never say doy!'

Dirk, stimulated by this encouragement, tried again and again, but in vain; the knife made no impression upon the dumpling.

'What can the matter be?' cried Mary, for the first time displaying a slight shade of anxiety; 'can I have forgotten anything in the mixing?'

'Perhaps the suet, Mary,' suggested Dirk quietly.

'Sure an' that's just what I did forgit; Holy Mary! but isn't the master clever to have thought ov it now, ma'am?'

And Mary in her ecstasy of admiration looked to her master and mistress alternately, with uplifted hands.

It was a melancholy ending of the feast, but for the life of him Dirk could not swear. He left all for the last moment, when, reaching their bedroom, tired out and fasting, they found everything in the same condition as they had been left in the morning. However, the expletives he then indulged in never reached the unconscious ears of the fair object, from whose bedroom adjoining, were wafted the sonorous sounds which proved her past vengeance, and in that happy first state of contented oblivion which only innocence and over-fed aldermen can indulge to perfection.

CHAPTER IV

MR. MOLOCH'S SANCTUM

NEXT morning, after a futile attempt on the part of the willing and agreeable Mary to get the breakfast up to time, Dirk set forth with his portfolio once more under his arms, citywards.

The artistic gentleman whom he had met at Mr. Melgarf's had enclosed his letter of introduction to Mr. Moloch, along with the pleasing intelligence of his unanimous election to the club, also telling him the best day and hour upon which to make his call, so that he might not be disappointed. He had also written a private letter explaining why he was calling, with an account of his last reception at the hands of the other rival editor, so that the path was made as pleasant to the young man as it could possibly have been made.

It was a vast establishment, this publishing firm of Grabblcson and Co., where whole armies of writers, artists, and workmen were employed, watched over by a large staff of editors. The works they published were entirely of the religious, mind-improving, and highly moral order of literature; and when they purchased anything, they bought all rights exclusively, to do with what they liked, either in the wholesale cutting-up or altering.

It was a limited liability company, in which most of the employees found it to their interest to be shareholders. Each editor had full control of his own department, and when in office, ruled there like a savage prince of some Oriental country; while the Grand Sultan, for there was only one supreme head of the concern, seldom showed himself, and never condescended to interfere with the dictates or tyrannies of those editorial underlings. So long as they made their department succeed financially, they were at liberty to act

as they liked; if their returns failed to come up to the average standard laid down, then they got their dismissal as promptly as if they were only printers' boys, and with as little consideration.

They were constantly changing hands at this establishment, under the idea, doubtless, that new brooms sweep the cleanest.

Ensconced in his minor sanctuary, and hedged securely round by his satraps and myrmidons, it was utterly impossible for any application ever to reach the ear of the chief. The author or artist, wronged by an editor, might write a thousand explanations; each missive was handed to the unjust editor to answer as he liked, while the great Mogul occupied himself alone in the pleasant work of raking in the gold.

Only one method of obtaining justice was open to the injured one, and that was to set to work and find out the other editor who hated the man who had wronged him; by trading upon their mutual hatred he had a faint chance of getting righted in the other department.

There was a great amount of malice, suspicion, and hatred brewed in this fountain-head of morality, self-culture, and religion. Each man and boy became the spy and evil-wisher of his neighbour, from the message lads upwards, and when a man went into the house of Grabbleson and Co., it was like an insect going into a spider mesh, or a mouse into an intricate mouse-trap. If he was not a spider, he would be sucked dry and cast away. Only by keen watching, underhand sneaking, constant exertion and discreet brow-beating, could he hope to keep his life. The system was arranged upon the beautifully working model of the Spanish Inquisition, with a fine blending of the system of Asiatic courts. They managed to drain blood from every article they took up, short of stone, and in consequence flourished amazingly.

When Dirk approached the outer office from which he had stalked so indignantly before, he was greeted by the same white-faced, lantern-jawed youth who had delivered, with such grinning delight, the insolent refusal.

'If you come to see Mr. Hacker, I was to tell you that he could not see you,' spontaneously said the boy, with the well-known india-rubber grin of apish pleasure.

'I do not come to see Mr. Hacker; I have come to deliver a letter to Mr. Moloch.'

An instant and ghastly change overspread the boy's face.

'Is it by appointment, *sir*?'

'Yes.'

'Please to fill up that form and I'll take it in.'

The boy looked wonderingly at Dirk as he calmly filled up one of the pieces of paper which lay upon the desk for that purpose, in fact indulged in a subdued whistle of consternation.

After a little time he returned, a totally different boy; servility and respect were in every line of his sickly visage.

'Mr. Moloch will see you at once, sir, if you will kindly step this way.'

Dirk felt a little thrill of trepidation in his heart, although he showed nothing of it in his step as he followed his ex-tormentor but now sycophant guide, into the sanctum where the man he had come to see sat by the side of a row of electric bell-knobs and telephonic tubes.

'How do you do, Mr. Davelock?' was all the frightened boy heard in a friendly tone, as he closed the door, and went to report to some of the other satellites that old Hacker had made a big mistake now that the despised 'cove' had found out his enemy.

A little, slight-built, insignificant man of about forty-eight, with a light pointed beard and thin whiskers turning grey, a womanish and quiet manner about him, and faded blue eyes.

The hand was very soft, yet fleshless and cold, which he put into Dirk's, and gave him a slightly unpleasant sensation, so that he was glad to let it go and take the chair towards which the other pointed.

'You have brought some specimens of your work with you, I see; let us have them out for inspection.'

Dirk, with a nervous heat-wave passing over him, opened out his portfolio and laid it upon the desk in front of the little man, who rapidly turned them over, one after another.

'Very good—very good. I think these are the same that you brought before to show Mr. Hacker, as my friend tells me.'

'There are one or two here which he declined.'

'Which are the ones?' asked Moloch, in a sweet tone.

'This is one, and this, and this,' hastily replied Dirk, selecting three from the others, noticeable from their bruised condition, the crutch-point trade-mark of Mr. Hacker being still discernible over them.

'Ah!'

Mr. Moloch looked at them with half-shut eyes for a moment, with grave meditation. Dirk watched his face the while with intense anxiety, which made his mouth dry and parched, and his throat feel as if it was cracking; so much, he fancied, depended upon this autocrat's favourable opinion.

It was a quiet and emotionless face that Dirk's thirsty eyes devoured, with ears almost like flappers, so large they were in comparison with the pinched face. He noticed that as the other looked at the drawings, these huge ears twitched slightly and grew redder, while the front teeth, always a little prominent, glistened more, as they were bared in a gentle half-smile.

'I think I shall select these three to use for one of our magazines; I like them very much.'

'Thank you, sir.' Dirk's voice was husky with the emotion that was almost choking him.

'You write also, my friend tells me. Indeed I may say I have heard before of your literary gifts.'

Mr. Moloch had laid the drawings on one side, and was grinning affably upon his *protégé*.

'Yes, Mr. Moloch.'

'Then write something to suit these drawings—not too long; say five thousand words, a story with a good moral to it, and just enough interest to let people read it through without getting excited.'

'I'll try to give you something suitable,' murmured Dirk, who had never tried to write to order before, and was not quite sure if he could manage it.

'Yes, do; only remember it has to be quiet, moral, and not too long, nor too *exciting*.'

'Yes, sir.' Dirk rose and prepared to put up his portfolio again, fumbling about it awkwardly, for he was half blind with the excitement of success. Mr. Moloch also rose.

'Of course, you know, I cannot guarantee that your manuscript will be taken as well as the sketches. However, I shall do my best to get it taken.'

'I shall write it on approval.'

'That is what I wished you to understand, as the literary work is entirely out of my department. And as to price, well, I think you had better leave that for me also to manage.'

'Thank you, sir, I will.'

Dirk held out his hand, and with it gave his whole heart of grateful affection to the 'Art' editor, after which he staggered towards the door.

'Pardon me, Mr. Davelock, but you have forgotten your portfolio.'

Mr. Moloch, with his front teeth showing like a rabbit's under his straw-tinted, scraggy moustache, came half-way with the portfolio, which Dirk seized; and again saying 'Good-day' in a husky whisper, hurried out of the door, Mr. Moloch watching him as he stumbled out, with the same quiet smile, and one hand gently caressing the other.

'I think I shall be able to use that young man somehow,' murmured he, going back to his desk, while the fortune-favoured Dirk passed through the outer office, oblivious of the smiling boy and his proffer to tie up his bundle more securely. He recovered his presence of mind only when he reached the busy pavement outside.

CHAPTER V

A FRIEND IN NEED

MR. MELGARF, under the impression that his young friend had enough to live upon comfortably, and so could afford to help him to kill time, called, or wrote pretty frequently about this time, to propose little excursions or sight-seeings, offers which Dirk did not like to refuse for fear of offending the kindly disposed if rather persistent old gentlemen.

'You must knock about and meet people if you want to get on,' said this self-constituted mentor. And much as Dirk wished to settle into stern work and economise, he was forced to yield; feeling as he did that perhaps his friend was giving up his time entirely for his benefit, to advance him in life.

But the hour had arrived when he could no longer spend a copper, even for the sake of getting on. They were strangers in a strange land, without credit, and the most slavish of the tradesmen who had rushed and hustled one another to implore the favour of his custom, as if all they craved for was to give away their wares, wanted terms of strict cash and would give no other.

He had grown horribly afraid of and frightened for the vast city which appeared so heartless, brutal, and callous. The beggars he met frightened him with their awful, hopeless poverty, which seemed to eclipse all other grades of poverty, and the crowds he met going about homeless, hungry, and famishing. While the other crowds of well-dressed, smug-looking, pitiless men and women, to whom all the wretchedness seemed less than nothing, paralysed his energies and filled his whole being with a sickening desire to run away from those fearsome streets, these miles of

bricks which covered up such utter misery and heartless prosperity.

As the money grew less, so did this horrible fear increase, until he could have howled out his impotent despair and helpless misery. Nothing came to him. He did not know where to look for work, and no one was there to advise them, nor seem to care what he did.

He had tried all the editors, but those he saw said that they were filled up for the present, and declined his offers with thanks. Picture shops gave him the same reply, they were supplied; in fact Metaltown had all that it appeared to require in every department. All it seemed to want was to take his money from him, and cast him out to starve or drown himself, and the surplus crowd of humanity which he had brought with him.

His manuscript had been accepted by the literary editor on the Art editor's recommendation, and the proof sheets had been returned, but they made no further sign of paying for it or the sketches, nor did they seem eager for more, at least they did not suggest any more subjects. Mr. Moloch had played his little revenge upon Mr. Hacker, and felt for the present satisfied.

'Ask Mr. Melgarf's advice, Dirk; when he knows our circumstances he may suggest something or some way to make money,' said Mrs. Davelock. So Dirk sat down in his desperation, pen in hand, to explain everything to this 'sage philosopher and friend.'

He had always been so polite and considerate in his inquiries after Mrs. Davelock and the children, and appeared so fond of her husband, that she felt quite confident as to how he would come up.

Mr. Melgarf's reply came before himself, a wild splutter of savage indignation. He had never heard of such a thing; no one but a downright madman would think of coming to Metaltown without plenty of money and friends, and the only advice he could give, was to get out of it as fast as possible——

He did not write—'and be hanged,' but Dirk felt from the disjointed style of that blotted missive that he meant it as a fitting termination.

He swooped down like a raised vulture in about an hour after the postman had delivered his characteristic epistle.

Dirk, wanting to be alone to think it all over, had just sent his wife, with Mary and the children, out to take a walk, when they met the old friend of the family—that was—at the gate.

He had always been so plausible and courtly upon former occasions of their meeting, that Helen could not help being struck and hurt at the alteration in his demeanour now.

'Is your husband in, Mrs. Davelock?' he asked harshly, brushing past the perambulator without noticing her outstretched hand or touching his hat, the hat that had been wont to come off so readily.

'Yes, Mr. Melgarf,' Helen Davelock replied coldly, as she walked off, while her husband opened the door to the imperious knock.

A frozen gleam was in the cold, grey eyes as he entered the studio and took a chair, while Dirk stood like a condemned criminal in front of him.

'Well, Dirk, I am sorry for you, but, as I said in my letter, the one and only advice I can give, is to pack up without the loss of an hour and go back to where you came from.'

'Don't you think there is a chance for me here?'

'Not the ghost of a chance.'

'No chance of selling my pictures?'

'No chance for pictures *like these.*'

The old man swept his icy glance round the room, the first look he had ever taken of the pictures. He was the soul of candour now, if nothing else.

'Leave Metaltown if you don't want to starve; leave Art, which isn't for the like of you; get an honest living somehow in the country.'

'Can you not suggest the *somehow*, Mr. Melgarf?'

'How can I suggest? I can only say, get out, and as quickly as you can.'

In his excitement two of the buttons of his coat became loosened; with a feverish motion he hastily rebuttoned them, and as Dirk watched him he felt as if he was firmly buttoning up his heart and pocket-book in case this unfortunate should ask him for anything.

'Thank you for your good advice, Mr. Melgarf. I am sure it is kind of you to come so far to give it to me.'

'Don't mention it, my good man. I only speak for your benefit; I like to do what good I can.'

Dirk took a chair and filled his pipe, as the old man, to calm his outraged feelings, took out his, and both began to smoke in silence.

'Here is a book that you have often admired, a rare edition; will you accept it as a mark of my gratitude for your attention during my Metaltown visit?'

Dirk did not tell his ancient mentor that it had cost him five pounds once upon a time, and that its present valuation was thirteen, as he lifted the little volume from the table and held it out, and the old man did not say whether he thought it worth taking as he silently dropped it into his outside pocket. But Dirk felt easier after giving it, for it seemed an equivalent for that bachelor's dinner, and what loss of time and other expenditure the aged one had laid out during their sight-seeing together.

This final visit, as they both then thought it to be, was short as the first visit had been, and much more candid, for they both knew each other now thoroughly, and valued one another accordingly.

That night, as Dirk and his wife sat together after Mary and the children had gone to bed, for Mary was always ready to retire to bed when wanted, his young countryman called, as he often did after office hours, to have a pipe together and chat, and they told him of their resolve to leave the city.

'Take my advice and don't, or you'll regret it all your lives; never mind the old buffer, something will turn up, you'll see.'

This young man was the only one in Metaltown who firmly believed in Dirk's genius, and had a firm confidence in the turning up of something. The children liked him, and the tom-cat 'Snodjy' would sit upon his knees, while the sheep dog always welcomed him with grave surprise; although at times he was a trifle too buoyant for the gloomy feelings of the disappointed artist and his melancholy, dark-eyed wife.

That night the young man's confidence gave Dirk new courage, and he felt almost inclined to hold on a little longer; it was soothing to feel that he wasn't altogether despised and rejected amongst men.

Next day something did turn up, much to his surprise; a carriage and pair drove up and stopped at his front gate, while the smart groom ran up the steps and knocked.

'Is this Mr. Davelock's?'

'Yes,' said Dirk wonderingly.

'All right, sir,' cried out the groom, touching his hat to a handsome and handsomely dressed lady, and a gentleman, who slowly descended with a pretty young girl and advanced to meet him.

'My name is Herbert. I noticed your advertisement, Mr. Davelock, and came down to hear about your terms for my daughter here.'

Dirk remembered with consternation that he was without his coat, the day being a hot one, and, giving up expecting visitors, he had been working in his shirt-sleeves, and only went to the door thinking it to be a greengrocer or something of that sort. However, it was too late to do more than apologise and ask them to walk in.

The terms suited, and they admired the pictures, and Dirk thought it all settled, when he felt slightly dashed as the gentleman said—

'Well, I like your appearance and your style of painting, but I have almost committed myself to another teacher——'

Here the young lady tugged at her father's sleeve and whispered something.

'What is it?—oh, you don't like him—you'd rather have Mr. Davelock for a master, would you?—well, so would I, and if we can break with the other man, Lily, you shall have him.'

It was finally settled that Dirk was to call on the Monday to have the matter decided.

'The other fellow, you know, is one of these ha-ha! dress-coated fraternity, with plenty of airs about him and very little to show of what he has done. Not like you, with a whole roomful of work, and not afraid to show yourself in your working costume. Come along, my dears, and leave Mr. Davelock to get on with his work; if we can have him we will.'

And so this hearty Englishman, with his breezy manner, swept half the gloomy foreboding away from Dirk's brains as if they had been cobwebs, and Dirk for the first time saw that the sun was shining outside, as they drove away waving their hands to him.

CHAPTER VI

'ABOUT AS MUCH BLUE AS MAY MAKE A SAILOR'S SHIRT FROM'

AT sea they have a saying that if you can see enough blue amongst the clouds as would make a sailor's shirt, then there are hopes of the storm clearing. This was the first rift in the sky of Davelock's fortunes since his arrival, and as bad luck and good luck often run in veins and streaks across a man's life, like the pockets and runs of ore in a gold mine, now that he had in a manner come to signs, he might begin to hope for some more to follow. Of course, one pupil was not much, but still it was something to begin from, and it was, along with his story, a start.

He had not been altogether left to dark fate during these months of gloom and forlornness. The postman occasionally left him letters which gave him, for an hour or two, a fugitive kind of cheerfulness. Letters from literary and art admirers came to him now and again, filled with expressions of keen appreciation and critical praise on his past efforts, from judges high enough in the world's opinion to have lifted him out of the narrow Melgarfian atmosphere. But they were far off, and their praises were only dumb words on paper, while the nearer influence seemed alive and stronger in its sounding, and struck more swiftly to the heart through the ears than it could through the eyes. It is the censure or applause that we *hear* which affects the sensitive the most, and lingers the longest after all.

He knew, of course, his own powers, but he did not know his own gift of persuasion. When the icy eye fell upon his work and the freezing voice damned it, he had sufficient knowledge of his art to feel that all this was but the outcome of either ignorance or else malevolent injustice. Yet this

voice to him, at the moment, represented the voice of the public to which he looked for support, the other but echoes from the past out of which he had drifted, with a future uncertain, and filled with storm-clouds.

Sometimes after one of these visitations, when the aged one sat ghoul-like upon his spirits, he had been near to the fate of Chatterton or Hayden, when the only solace seemed to be the folds of the dark mantle, from which emerged the fleshless arm, holding the scythe, sharpened for him to fall upon.

Perhaps he might have yielded to the evil suggestions left, but for the thought of that beautiful mother and those five helpless ones dependent upon him so utterly; with the occasional cheering letters which the postal mercury left for him, and so he braced himself up for another effort.

'It must come, it must come,' he muttered savagely, as he set his teeth, and resolved to snatch from hatred what he could not win from love.

It was a week of elation, all through, after this pleasant and unexpected break on the Monday. When he called upon Mr. Herbert, he found that the 'ha-ha!' teacher had been got rid of and himself engaged. On the Tuesday an old patron fished him up by accident and bought one of his pictures straight away, praising up the others, and elevating him to the seventh heaven.

He also received a note from Mr. Moloch asking him to call about some more work, so that when Mr. Melgarf next came, expecting to find an empty house, he was able to surprise the old gentleman with his series of good fortune, and even to impress his hopeless mind that the battle was not yet lost entirely. The name of Herbert was great in the commercial and money market, and the fact that he had taken him up was enough to inspire even Mr. Melgarf with a dawning of respect.

He went the length of looking narrowly at the pictures for sale, and admitted before he left that 'they seemed fairly good.' He returned in fact two days afterwards, with the startling intelligence that his great brother would like to purchase two of Davelock's pictures, and that he would not mind going in for one himself, if he could get them at the price he was commissioned to spend.

Not much of a price certainly, but Dirk felt so astounded at this downpour of good fortune that he opened his heart to his old friend, forgetting all the former phases of his character, and gave him his choice from his entire collection, seeing that the great brother depended upon his judgment.

'They will be very much seen in his house, so it will do you good.'

'Then take my best!' responded Dirk, pointing out three of the largest canvases upon which he had lavished months of careful, loving study; and thus the bargain was settled, Dirk forcing upon him an extra picture, also one of his best, for his kindness.

'I shall get on now,' said Dirk to his wife, 'when *he* begins to buy.' And she thought that he would.

After the pictures were framed and sent home, Dirk waited with confidence upon the appreciative letter to come, inviting him to see his pictures hung, etc. etc., what he had always hitherto received from former patrons, for it had been his boast that purchasers had liked his pictures better on their walls than in his studio. But nothing of that sort came; it was too much concession from the Melgarfian dignity. When he hinted, after waiting for some weeks, that he would like to see how they looked, his aged friend brought him to the proper level by answering that they were not yet hung; indeed they did not know whether they had room for them, they had so many valuable works already on their walls by *successful* artists. He was not successful enough yet to be admitted amongst their treasures.

Better luck of all, they had actually got rid of Mary for the time by finding her another place. It was a hard matter to break the allegiance of this too faithful modern servitor, who, although only blessing them so recently with her presence, yet had read them sufficiently well to be resolved to stick by them while they had a bite left, or till death should them part.

When they had reckoned up the added expenses, with spoilt dishes, broken crockery, and general discomfort—for Mary spoilt and broke everything she laid hands on, and never got out of the mess nor tried to make an effort to do so—they felt they could not afford this luxury; indeed, the

big house frightened them with its heavy rent and large taxes, so they approached the handmaid diplomatically :—

'You are wasted here, Mary!'

'Sure an' I don't mind that.'

'But you ought to; you should be in a gentleman's house.'

'Sure, then, if you want me to get a better place, you 'll have to find it for me,' returned Mary emphatically, but with her invariable good nature, therefore Dirk set about advertising, and at last got an applicant.

Fortunately for him, the lady insisted mostly upon good temper.

'If she is good-tempered we shall get on, as I can teach her all the rest!'

Dirk could say with all sincerity that Mary had an angel's temper; in fact, that nothing earthly could disturb her. So the affair was settled satisfactorily to all parties, and Mary took her monstrous box and departed, regretted in a sense by all, but by the children mostly.

They struggled through one week after her departure, getting the wreckage cleared, and the rooms once more into order, when, just as they were congratulating themselves upon the comfort of having a house to themselves, Mary put in her appearance.

'She 's a baist of a mistress, so I have given her me lave, and I intend coming back to make yez all happy!'

Mrs. Davelock gazed with consternation on her visitor, and said feebly :—

'But we cannot afford to keep you, Mary.'

'What 's the wages to me, ma'am; I want a home, an' it 's here I can have it or nowhere; I 'll come to you without wages, so expect my box down to-morrow night.'

A bright idea, born from desperation, darted through Mrs. Davelock's mind.

'But I 'm going home, Mary, with the children——'

'The more need that I should come to make the master comfortable while yez are away from him.'

Were they fated? Dirk came to the rescue, with a look at his wife which she understood, for she rose and left them alone.

'Mary, I regard you as a friend,' began Dirk confidentially.

'Certainly, sorr, I am your friend.'

'Well, you see, Mary, you are a very good-looking girl, and people might talk if you and I were alone, and Mrs. Davelock away—you see, one must study public opinion.'

'Oh, I see, sorr; the mistress may be jealous ov me?'

Dirk gave his assent by discreet silence.

'Och, but I wouldn't make her jealous for the world, sorr, for I like her and the children too; so I'll just endure my present mistress till they come back; thank ye for the kindly hint.'

Mary was mollified, and they got out of what looked like an approaching catastrophe.

The home of the Herberts formed the oasis of Dirk Davelock's desert. Frank, open, hospitable, and generous, they made him always welcome as a friend, rather than a tutor. The father, a true type of the hearty Englishman whom Dirk had read of, but not as yet met, a strong Conservative in his politics, and like all true Conservatives, liberal and generous in his social ideas. The mother, also, the ideal of old English wifehood and motherhood, with a winsome face and a comforting figure; and the daughter like an English rose just budding.

She had been educated in Paris, and, therefore, her style of drawing and painting was broad, confident, and good, so that her master had little to unlearn her. Consequently they got on well together from the start; she listened to his instructions with intelligence and watched him working with attention, so that they worked like younger and older artists, rather than master and pupil. Lily Herbert took a delight in her work, and Dirk spared no pains to push her on and improve her mind, for he was comfortable in her society, and at home with her father and mother.

By and by Dirk's story, with illustrations, appeared in the magazine and won some notice, as his articles mostly did, in provincial papers, some of the strong passages being quoted in full as extracts.

He had sold several pictures to his friend, Mr. Herbert, also one which had been exhibited at an autumn exhibition, and taken notice of by the critics, favourably.

In fact, he felt, as did also Mr. Melgarf, that he was getting on, only for one thing—the scarcity of the almighty dollars.

Try how he would, money flew. Mr. Herbert paid handsomely for what he bought, and believed in his bargains. But there were times between, when the exchequer became very low, and then Dirk felt despondent and desperate.

He did not confide any more of his troubles to the old man, but received him in his weekly visits with what cheerfulness he could best summon up; even while he was thinking upon dresses and boots required, with the hundred other difficulties to be encountered by all those who have to trust to chance. But still the old man's penetrating eyes grasped it all, although he gave no hint or suggestion how to mend or help matters on. He contented himself with proverbs and maxims, and said now that he ought to get on with his pluck and perseverance.—'I really do think that you would get on in Metaltown if you had an income to back you, but——'

Always the 'but,' and ever the disparaging word that Dirk hated, never an opening shown. Still he came up to hand, week after week, to smoke his pipe with them, brood upon their difficulties, and suck their vitality out of them, an owner of bad luck that they had to endure for the sake of that one dubious *charity* which he had displayed.

So matters went on, Dirk butting his head against dead walls, getting a glimpse of encouragement, again to be shut out, with that one generous friend only left to console him, and the occasional crust sent out by Mr. Moloch; until the idea came to him, as a postscript, of making a tour through Australia, the land he knew so well, that brought him by return of post the favourable reply with which we began this story.

'This is my one chance,' he said to his wife.

'Our separation,' she replied.

'The tide in the affairs of man which, taken at the flood, *may* lead on to fortune,' misquoted the ancient one.

'I'll take it at the flood,' responded Dirk confidently.

CHAPTER VII

PLANNING OUT

THERE were more people than Dirk Davelock looking out for 'the tide in their affairs.' Mr. Moloch, for one, had been puzzling his narrow brains to think out just such an idea as Dirk had proposed; for he felt that unless he could startle the grand Mogul with something new, and which was likely to bring in grist to the mill, it would shortly be all up with his influence in that firm.

Dirk's postscript gave him just what he wanted, an idea; and he felt, as he rubbed his hands over it, that this young and comparatively unknown man would just be the man to accomplish it for his, Mr. Moloch's, own advancement, the exact one to make a catspaw of now, and push back again to obscurity after he was done with him; hence the very gracious yet uncompromising answer which he had posted.

Of course there were many well-known men who might have jumped at a mission of such importance; but then it would be difficult to push their claims aside afterwards, while with this applicant it would be child's play to blank him out. Also he had said that he knew the ground, which not many of the others did; besides, he combined the qualities of artist and writer, which would save expenses.

'At the worst, I can always disparage and condemn his drawings when he comes back, besides crippling him with conditions which he cannot possibly fulfil,' murmured this art editor. 'He will be enthusiastic and eager to distinguish himself, so will consent to almost any terms; yes, if he knows the ground, as he says he does, he will suit my purpose exactly.'

Mr. Moloch went home to dinner that night in a better mood than he had been for a long time past, for he had felt his influence waning.

'I shall be a director over this job, if I manage my cards rightly.'

Mr. Moloch had sought to score a point before this, by inaugurating a new style into the art works of the establishment, but with as yet only very dubious success.

Managers of this firm had to distinguish themselves by successful changes if they wished for promotion; it was like the old Republic of France, which made no excuse for failure. This art innovation was but the outcome of his school, and might be termed the all-effacing style, opposed to romanticism and realism; a new school founded entirely upon tone.

Tone, or gradation, was the be-all and end-all of their art being with this modern school, subject a matter of supreme indifference. They naturally abhorred costume or historical subjects, or where action was depicted. The commonplace and spiritless were the objects of their existence. They were not Realists as Zola is, for they did not paint what they saw, but only took the object as an excuse. A copied photograph would do well enough to serve as the basis of their finikin operations; gloating upon dead walls or indefinite backgrounds, where they could softly gradate the shades of grey, and give the engraver as much uninteresting work as they could give him to do, and the general public as little to look at as possible.

This was the new style which Mr. Moloch had inaugurated in black and white, as totally unlike the handicraft of Small, Gilbert, Doré, or the great masters, as he and his employees could attain.

Variety of manner was regarded as a heinous crime in this new temple of Art. The names or initials at the corner of the pictures showed that they were by different hands, but only one brain-motive was displayed throughout all. It was a renaissance of mechanical education on a different basis, but governed by the same unalterable rules which chained the old Egyptian statue-maker.

Of course the public, not educated enough to be satisfied with gradation, longed, with a Philistinish longing, for subject, and had about this time shown their weariness of the same thing being served out to them, month after month, in their usual way, by ceasing to become subscribers. The sales were beginning to fall short in his special department,

and so the fate of Moloch was trembling in the balance, when this suggestion of something fresh came just in time to save his reputation.

That evening, after partaking of a light dinner, for Mr. Moloch possessed a digestion similar to his brains and slight body, and while enjoying the one cigarette to which he limited himself per day, he received a visit, by private appointment, from one of his most useful satellites—a heavy and stolid young man, with a bilious-looking complexion and yellow-speckled dull eyes, who took the chair offered to him by his employer with an uncouth air of self-importance.

'Well, Mr. Hinderlans,' said Mr. Moloch, as he smiled upon his *protégé*, 'how would you like a foreign tour? You have not been quite up to tone lately.'

Mr. Hodge Hinderlans had been ill for some time past, and required a sea voyage more than anything else to set him up; but being a far-seeing young man, he straightway scented some advantage to be gained by this benevolence of his superior; so that he was in no hurry to give himself away.

'That depends upon how long it might be, sir; you see, with exhibitions coming on and——'

'Oh, I shall be able to look after your interests while you are away, and this tour will be to your decided advantage; in fact, we are now contemplating an extensive work on the Antipodes, which will bring your name prominently before the public.'

'Yes, I wouldn't object going so far, provided that I am not expected to go into any danger.'

He spoke with a certain surly respect which did not exhibit much eagerness.

'There are snakes, I am told, out in these parts, and all, without exception, deadly,' he added.

'You will have no danger to face at all; in fact, I shall arrange it so that you can stay in the towns, and work up from photographs which you can obtain out there. I will send with you a man to do all the risky work, a fellow of no importance whatever, who will take care of you, and save you from all risks, and whom it does not matter much whether he comes back or not; as you will have all the drawings to do when you come back, with all the credit.'

'Is he an artist?' inquired Hodge jealously; he was

jealous of every artist, jealous of his superior also, although he affected to despise him and other pretenders in the Art world, believing only in one artist, to wit, himself.

'Yes, I suppose he is, but not at all in your style, therefore not worth considering. Nothing has as yet been arranged; but you shall know more to-morrow, when I introduce you to your probable companion. Your principal duty, outside your work, if this comes off, will be to watch him narrowly, report all his actions, and throw as much discredit upon him as you like, so long as you do not hinder the work too much. Let him take all the hard labour, and keep yourself free to do only good work, for you know how much I depend upon *you*.'

'Yes, I understand,' Mr. Hinderlans answered slowly, while the speckles in his eyes shot forth yellower gleams of self-content. He knew that his employer admired his acquired mastery over gradations, as much as he despised the other's attempts in the same direction; and he foresaw a gay old time before him of badgering this unknown and unappreciated companion, the only kind of game which could possibly amuse him. When the two parted they were mutually pleased with each other and the prospects that were opening before them.

CHAPTER VIII

IS BLOOD THICKER THAN WATER?

A BUSY month passed after this in making and altering plans on the part of the hopeful Dirk, with many interviews, during which Mr. Moloch cajoled and played with the young man as a cat might play with a mouse.

He did not tell him at first about his companion. A night's calm rest had made him resolve to have all the plans revealed first, so that he got a project of the work from beginning to end, with an estimate of the time required to travel over the vast continent.

'Of course you will have all the credit of the great work if you can carry it out,' answered Mr. Moloch sweetly.

Dirk planned colony by colony very carefully at first, allowing himself time to do the work conscientiously with pen and pencil.

'It is too long a time, I fear,' said Mr. Moloch, 'and will involve too much expense; however, I shall lay it before the Board.'

A week passed of intense suspense. Then another message came.

'Can you not do this quicker? It will be such a chance for you of making your name, for, of course, your name will be on the cover as projector of the work.'

Dirk went home, and carefully reconsidered his plans.

'I might do it in two years with extra hard work,' he thought. 'Yes, I'll pledge myself to two years.'

Then Mr. Moloch sprang upon him the companion.

'Could you not do it in half the time if you had a companion to help you?'

An uneasy thrill passed through the mind of Dirk. This

suggestion meant sharing the honours, and as the idea was his own, he wanted to distinguish himself.

'Of course you will be the leader, and this companion will only be sent out to help you.'

'Can he rough it?' asked Dirk bluntly. 'And will he be content to work hard?'

'I think so; he is one of our cleverest artists.'

'Then say one year instead of two.'

Dirk knew that he was pledging himself to a desperate engagement, yet the reward loomed up before him, and he was lured on by the editor's next words.

'It will be hard work, I admit; but after that you will never want employment *all your natural life* with our firm.'

Who with an uncertain future and a wife and five children could pause after this, a lifetime of employment for one year of slavery and exile?

'I'll do it, if my companion works with me, in twelve months.'

'Then I think you may prepare to go at a day's notice,' replied Mr. Moloch, and Dirk pressed his hand with silent gratitude, and rushed home to get his family away as quickly as possible.

His new-found friend, Mr. Herbert, came up nobly at this crisis, and bought the stock of pictures he had at a slump sum, giving him enough to pay up his rent, and furnish them all out with winter clothes and other providings needful for the journey, and for those who were to be left at home.

The Herberts were sorry to lose him as a teacher and as a friend, but vowed that they would wait upon his return rather than engage another during his absence.

Mrs. Davelock decided to take a small house in the country beside her own people, while her husband was away. It would have been more economical if she had decided to have gone to some sea-coast among perfect strangers. But it had been a weakness of hers to go year after year since their marriage to this, her native place, even although she had received scant welcome when she did so. Nothing could wean her from this infatuation.

There are relatives who sympathise and relatives who are more unsympathetic than strangers. Of this latter class were her friends as well as Dirk's on his side. Still she had

love enough in her heart to forget past neglect, and anticipate with eagerness each new meeting. When she paid these annual visits, it was not as other daughters do, to live as a guest with her parents. Twice only through all those years had she been invited to stay to tea ; but even this was better than Dirk's reception with his friends, for he had not been once so far favoured.

She generally took a cottage near to her mother's house, intending always to have a merry time of it, but the first morning call after her arrival, dispelled all these visionary ideas of felicity. The utter lack of even ordinary interest in either herself, her children, or her husband's affairs dried up the flood of her affection, and put her into her true position in their estimation—that of an outsider to their domestic circle, and at the best an intruder in their midst. She had a father and mother, and brothers and sisters-in-law, all in comfortable circumstances, and seemingly in unity with each other. But the union was complete without this stranger, their only daughter and sister.

'How is it we are so much alone, you and I, Dirk?' she would ask wonderingly and pathetically sometimes. 'They are grandparents to all their grandchildren excepting mine ; kind and hospitable to strangers, all except you and me. My brothers are brothers to each other, their children cousins to all except our children. Is it anything in ourselves that is wanting, or do we expect too much?'

Dirk could not reply, for he had nothing to boast of on his own side of the family. He did not fancy that they either expected or asked too much, seeing that he, like herself, was ready to give to the full what they wished for—mutual sympathy and interest. Still, he felt at these times that it would have been much more satisfactory for them both if they had been friendless orphans at the start. They would then not have expected any kindness, and not have been disappointed when their yearning love was thrown back upon them so persistently and callously.

Of course, under these circumstances, she had long before given up telling of their disappointments, which had only been received by reproaches and recrimination ; and, instead, confined herself to telling the good news when she had any to tell. But even this had been treated with such complete

indifference or doubt that it seemed as if nothing could bring her nearer to the hearts of those she loved so devotedly and so unavailingly. They had all business subjects to talk of amongst themselves, and hopes or fears to ventilate when she was not near; subjects which were dropped in her presence, whenever she appeared amongst them, while they received her with chilling civility.

Still, she rushed out to them again and again, with her pretty children, whenever she had a holiday, with money to spend, hopeful as ever that the last year's impression must have been a mistake on her part. So unnatural it seemed to be when calmly considered afterwards, to be again driven home to her husband, broken-hearted and despairing.

Why did she go so often where she was not wanted? Partly because she soon forgot wrongs, and partly through the force of habit—she had never gone anywhere else; and had got to turn to this, her native place, when she felt the need of a change.

But Dirk, although he permitted her to have her own way, did not forget so easily. He remembered affronts which she had forgotten; cruelties which sear into a man's heart like red-hot brands, and never come out again; neglects hard enough to endure from callous strangers, trebly bitter from those who ought to have been friends. Still he loved her, and was able to endure her friends for her sake; his own he had cast from him utterly and for ever.

He remembered his early struggles when they were first married, as bad as these latter months of Metaltown experience, for he had all along forced favour from the throat of fate with a stern clutch. The time when starvation faced them and their young baby, when the relations gave them mockery instead of sympathy. Worse wrong, tried to make fate harder by taking to their bosom and bringing out another artist, one who had hosts of willing relations of his own; at the moment that they had come to nothing, filching from them the few friends they might have had, for the sake of this unknown stranger.

Through his merits he had made new friends when they had taken the old ones from him, and this with other straits had been got through without their aid or sympathy, but he could never forget the sick, half-starving wife, with no mother

near to nurse her through the illness which she, the mother, had seen coming on ; who had driven her away to her husband to avoid being troubled about her. Nor could he forget the father's brutality when he came and saw the desolation of that home and told them how much he had been the means of selling for the other man. He remembered, also, the brother so debonair when Fortune smiled upon them, so black and scowling when they needed him most, and the hour when he advised the friends to rush his pictures out to replace them by those of the other man. Remembering all this, as he put his wife and children, with their favourite animals, into the train that chill November morning, he did not feel much more joyful than his poor wife was at the parting.

Zola, in his condemned work 'La Terre,' with terrible but unexaggerated distinctness gives some domestic pictures of this description of relations more pitiless than enemies, with a greater facility for doing mortal injury.

'I shall come down the moment I know what ship we sail by, and spend the last hours with you and the children.'

Nelly Davelock could not speak, for she was choking ; she leaned back in the carriage cuddling her youngest baby-girl, Bell, in her arms to keep her warm, while the others filled up the rest of the seat, the cat and starling on the hat-rack, and the sheep-dog on the warming-pan at her feet.

Dirk was introduced to his travelling companion that day when he got back from the station, who acted throughout the interview with discreet but sullen silence. Dirk did not take to him much on that first interview.

'Don't go too far from home for the next few days, as we may want you at any moment,' observed Mr. Moloch when they parted ; so Dirk went home and began to make his preparations.

Fortunately for him he had plenty to do. His old friend, Mr. Melgarf, haunted him pretty constantly, but once more cheerful and respectful, as at his early visits, seeing that matters seemed to be shaping fairly well towards the tide in his young friend's affairs, although no agreement had been as yet drawn up, or final details gone into. The clerks were drawing up the forms, which would be ready in due course.

Dirk, feeling that he had no call upon the consideration of

Mr. Melgarf, forgave him his former changes and basked with gratitude in the present favourable one. Amongst his other commissions, was one from the old gentleman for a set of illustrations which he wished to present to a relation who was bringing out a book. Therefore Dirk did the illustrations while waiting, and in turn presented them to Mr. Melgarf. So happy was he in his good fortune, that he felt he could have bestowed presents on all his friends and enemies.

Mr. Melgarf took the illustrations as he had taken other presents before, as his just due for friendship bestowed, without committing himself by a remark as to their merits or otherwise.

'I suppose it must be the custom in polite society,' thought Dirk, 'but I wish he would be vulgar enough to say something after all my fortnight's hard work.'

CHAPTER IX

IN THE PRESENCE

WHAT a dreary Christmas and New Year that was to Dirk, while he waited in Metaltown on these slow arrangements being completed; and to his wife with those unsympathetic relatives in the country!

One letter would inform her that all was going on fairly, the next would tell her that something had cropped up to make them reconsider the whole matter from the beginning.

Oh! these weary delays, with the persistent questions asked if it was not settled yet, or why she had taken the mad step of rushing down before it was settled definitely. With the constant doubt thrown in, that it would likely all come to nothing in the end; 'likely enough another of Davelock's romantic dreams,' etc. etc.

He had not been allowed to indulge in many romantic dreams in his life. Harsh realism prevented all that. But any stone was good enough to throw at such an unfortunate daughter and her detested offspring.

However, the children, with the animals, throve in their new quarters, a small cottage, in spite of it all, and kept their mother too busy from morning till night for her to give way to the bitterness of her surroundings.

At last the papers were drawn up and signed and the ship named for their sailing, the week after. He had five days to spend with his family before he started upon his long voyage.

The conditions made him gasp a little as he read them over. Two illustrations per day; one hundred pages of foolscap manuscript per month. Booksellers to see; newspapers to interview; photographs to buy; routes for himself and companion to plan out; long distances to cover in such a brief space. He had been finally limited to six months

instead of twelve, from the day of landing to the day of sailing home again; in fact, a paper filled with heavy responsibilities, without one word as to the light in which he would be finally regarded when finished, or anything about his companion.

They had agreed to his own terms as to salary and expenses, for in his modesty he had marked these down low enough even to have satisfied an usurer, or a Shylock.

'You will be able to manage all this, I have no doubt,' observed Mr. Moloch, as he regarded the young man with a quiet smile.

'If you think so, Mr. Moloch, perhaps I shall, but it means working and travelling day and night.'

'Some, indeed many, of the illustrations will be very slight, such as corner-pieces and tail-bits, which will make it easier, and you will observe there is a clause that, if the work is not done in the six months, and we are satisfied with what progress you make we shall give you an extended lease, on the same conditions, of course.'

'Yes,' murmured Dirk uneasily, 'but what about my position in all this?'

'Leader, of course, with full control; your name as author of the work, and constant employment ever after,' replied Mr. Moloch promptly.

'It is not so written!'

'No, but that is nothing; leave it all to me to manage for you, only, do your utmost to make it a complete success, for my sake as well as your own.'

Mr. Moloch looked a very benevolent little man, as he uttered these assurances; and Dirk, as he met the eyes which did not flinch from his, felt his heart swell out with gratitude towards the stranger who had given him such a chance in life, and made a mental vow to do or die for the sake of his benefactor.

Without more ado, therefore, he signified his complete trust, by dashing in his name in the portion left for him to sign; after which Mr. Moloch added his, and the sallow-faced young office-boy did the same, as witness; so completing the bargain which made him body and brain the absolute property of Messrs. Grabbleson and Co. for the time mentioned.

'You will now see the head of the firm, and get a few words from him, a rare honour, I can tell you,' said Mr. Moloch, as he touched a bell with a grave solemnity.

'Is Mr. Grabbleson engaged at this moment?' he asked the boy who appeared.

'No, sir; he is waiting for you and Mr. Davelock.'

'Come this way, Mr. Davelock.'

There was unmistakable awe upon Mr. Moloch as he led the way through many doors and passages to the inner sanctuary, followed by Dirk; who, although trying to look impressed, could not help feeling amused at this mighty display of veneration for any mortal man.

He entered the Presence with a little curiosity, while his guide stood beside him with folded hands and downcast head.

'This is Mr. Davelock, sir!'

'Ah! so you are going to sunny climes, are you? Well, I envy you your trip, and wish you all success; I suppose you have settled everything upstairs?'

'Yes, sir'; Mr. Moloch bowed himself out, with Dirk beside him—the interview was over.

'You have seen and been approved of by the head of this establishment; go away and be happy, for your fortune is about as good as made.'

This from Mr. Moloch when they had regained his office.

'Not much to impress one so awfully,' thought Dirk; 'like the master of a sailing vessel in his Sunday clothes'; aloud, he only said:—

'And may I go now and spend the rest of my time with my wife and children?'

'Yes, you are at liberty to go, and I will see that all final instructions are handed to you before you sail,' replied Mr. Moloch graciously.

So Dirk departed with a beating heart.

CHAPTER X

FAREWELL

IT was about the middle of January that Dirk got his five days' leave of absence. Five days of sweet sorrow which fled with lightning speed, while he could do nothing but hang about his wife and children, looking at them as we are apt to look upon a loved land which is soon to fade away. It was five days of good-bye, with every hour that vanished grudged, and the hours that they slept mourned over, as something very precious which had been stolen from them.

He tried to soothe his poor wife when she broke down with the thought of those long months of weary waiting; and the awful responsibility of those five helpless lives; with the assurances he had received from his benefactor, Mr. Moloch, of constant future employment, which meant to them all that they needed to make them perfectly happy.

'God bless him!' Mrs. Davelock sobbed with streaming eyes; 'I shall never cease to pray for him and you while you are away, that your efforts may succeed beyond his utmost wishes, and I know you will do your best to make him proud of the man he has chosen.'

'His name, blended with yours, darling, will be my watch-word to revive me whenever I grow tired. I shall work like a Trojan, you may depend. It must be a success, for I will put every nerve into it and give them the very best of my brains.'

He received more consideration during this visit from his wife's relations than he had ever received before. They even bothered him to spend an evening with them before he left, from which, however, he excused himself on the plea that he could not spare an hour of the short time from his own fire-

side, a weakness which they all wondered at, and were offended about.

To watch his wife moving about doing her household duties was what he cared most for now. To brood upon her dark face with the large melancholy eyes. To notice the peculiarities of their different children, all lovely in their different ways. The gentle self-abnegation of the eldest daughter, who yielded everything to her brothers and sisters, with those humid blue eyes wearing the expression of a lamb's, a woman already, for she has had to act as half mother to the sturdy little Bell. The second daughter, clean, neat and self-confident, carrying her seven years of young life with wonderful dignity, celebrated by art critics already for her perfect features and cherub's face. His eldest son of nearly six, dark, like his mother, handsome and careless as a young prince, who flung away his gifts with a royal prodigality. His youngest son of four, pale-faced and intense, with the expression of a poet; and that youngest rogue who occupied all the household cares with her restless mischief, just beginning to lisp, with flaxen, curly hair, and eyes like forget-me-nots, or summer skies, who could not be kept clean despite all the washings, the favourite of every one—except her grandparents.

The animals came in for their share of yearning attention; 'Snodjy,' the white cat, who had sought them out in the holiday months at Metaltown, the time that city cats are left to forage for themselves, while their owners are enjoying the balmy breezes of sea-coast places; and who, finding himself cared for and comfortable, had stayed with them as Mary would liked to have done. 'Snodjy' was a sensitive cat, who would at times put his paws round his master's neck and shiver with horror, or the memory of past neglect, when his master would say, 'Cold! cold!' meaning the world, which they both understood by those words.

The sheep-dog 'Tweed,' who was still in the gawky period of doghood, and who already in the village had made for himself a host of enemies in dogs, boys, and men, but who adored his baby mistress, Bell.

'Richard,' the starling, who was an old institution, could imitate the running of water, the chatter of flying crows; and, most wonderful of all, hush the baby to sleep, as he had

heard his mistress do so often. 'Dick' had acted as night-nurse to all the younger children in their babyhood, and so by practice was proficient in the art.

In his cage at the window, near the cradle, he heard even in his sleep the first warning movement from below, and without raising his head from under his wing, would cry 'Whisty! whisty!! whisty!!!' in so exact an imitation of the mother's voice, that baby would be deceived and go off again; by day he recalled the phrases and tones of many past visitors. Sometimes he would startle Dirk, and make him look round expecting to see Mr. Melgarf with his everlasting pipe, when he would hear, 'Wonderful place for bricks!' or in a more desponding voice, 'It's no use struggling here'; latterly he had, however, caught up the more encouraging refrain of 'There is a tide in the affairs of man!' Altogether, this bird was a treasure-box of memory and nearly as much celebrated as their second daughter, Kate.

He was leaving them all alone, in this country village, with no one to tell their troubles to while he was away. Leaving them in the midst of a winter such as had not been known for fifty years, snow-storm upon snow-storm, till the roads were piled high as the hedges with the frozen drift, and the birds were dying by thousands.

Would God look after them more than He did after these sinless birds? Perhaps so; for they had no one else to look for aid, excepting God, and His earthly representative, as far as they were concerned, Mr. Moloch.

Dirk had arranged that a portion of his salary was to be sent to his wife in quarterly instalments. He had also insured his life in case of accidents, for a large amount, giving a bill to his friend Melgarf, who, now that he saw the chance of a return, found the cash required promptly enough. So, with what he had left over, after paying his outstanding debts, Dirk had given enough to keep them going till the first instalment came from Grabbleson and Co.

At length, the dread moment of parting had come. His ship left next morning, so he decided to travel all night, and be in time. Their furniture being stored and his luggage aboard, he had no further business to transact in Metaltown, as his companion, being on the spot, had undertaken to call the last thing at the office, before joining him at the train which

would take them to the docks, and bring to him any late thoughts or suggestions which Mr. Moloch might have to give.

A night of shrieking wind, and whirling snow which had fallen for two days, and still continued to fall, without cessation, as if heaven meant to bury the earth in another deluge of blinding white.

Ten o'clock, and the cab would be at the door in a few more moments. Dirk and his wife sat by the cradle of their sleeping Bell, listening to the breathings of the others, silent, for they had said all that they had to say.

'Here comes the cab,' said Dirk, starting up and flinging the outer door open, to let the driver see his way through the darkness, letting in a wild, flake-laden blast.

A deep rumbling, louder and more grumbling than the sound of wheels, broke over their heads as they both stood by the open door.

'Thunder in winter!' cried Mrs. Davelock, in an awe-struck tone.

'There's no use struggling!' muttered the sleepy starling from under his wing.

'A wild night,' answered Dirk, as he waited.

Another deep, resonant peal broke from the heavy darkness overhead, as the two lamps from the cab glowed indistinctly in the distance, followed by two intense, long flashes of lightning in quick succession.

'It is an omen of evil, Dirk, or a warning from heaven, for us not to part,' cried out his wife in wild alarm, as she clutched him by the arm, and tried to draw him inside. 'Don't go, my husband; don't let us part.'

'Nonsense, dear, it is an omen of success; the thunder means that I shall make a noise in the world, the lightning that my success shall be startling. Good-bye, dear love, good-bye!'

The cab was at the door. With one last close embrace he sprang from her; one last kiss at the sleeping lips, the last to little Bell, while the bird, startled at the noise, sleepily muttered—'Tide—affairs of men—no use struggling!'

Helen Davelock was alone with her sleeping children, peering with blinded eyes out of that open door at the retreating cab which carried away her husband, and the

snowflakes making her flying brown tresses look like the white locks of a grief-worn old woman ; alone with her sleeping children and no mother to comfort her.

'Oh, grannie, grannie!' she moaned, sinking in a heap upon the cold floor.

But her grannie was in her grave, and her mother was fast asleep in her bed, like her own children, for she had said that she did not wish to be disturbed that night, so had retired early.

BOOK SECOND

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

CHAPTER I

A PLEASANT COMPANION

SIX weeks after this Dirk Davelock and his companion, Hodge Hinderlans, landed in Melbourne.

A pleasant voyage from winter and Metaltown to Australia and summer. With genial companions on board, which made Dirk feel what a nice world this is after all to get through, if one can travel first-class, and what a number of friends one may make when there is no need to require their services.

He had been a general favourite on board, because, being hopeful, he found it an easy matter to make himself agreeable; even Neptune had spared him and allowed him to pass through the Bay of Biscay without a pang of sea-sickness.

It was otherwise with Hodge, however, for he had barely got free of the land before the demon seized upon his vitals, and rendered him *hors de combat*. Dirk, of course, tried to administer to him, as one chum ought to do to another, but his companion was sour and unsociable, hating him for his *beastly* robust constitution, and with his mission before him, making the berth they shared as uncomfortable as possible.

He hated him, also, after he had so far recovered, for his appetite, for Hodge could not do justice to the meals which were paid for. He made a point of his meals, but could never enjoy eating at sea, whereas Dirk had the appetite of a wolf all through.

'Look at him going through the whole number of courses,'

Hodge snarled; 'and yet he takes no proper exercise, whereas I have to take a two-hours' walk before I can struggle through three.'

This was one of the grievances which Hodge could not forgive nor let alone. Another potent wrong was Dirk's conversational gifts and easy way of gliding into confidential friendships. They all by turns trusted him with their love-secrets and future hopes, while Hodge sulked in the cold.

He wanted to impress the passengers with his gifts as a tonist, but to his supreme disgust Dirk took also to sketching, and the *ignorant* crowd liked Dirk's rapid, effective work better than the soft, slow blurrs, because they understood them better; and no matter how much Hodge sneered at them, they stuck to their own taste in the matter. They called Dirk the artist and Hodge his companion, until at length he shut up his sketch-book sullenly, and retired to his bed to brood over his wrongs and meditate upon his future triumph. And yet he had to own that Dirk was good-natured and obliging, and bore with his sneers and surliness wonderfully well. 'Like his appetite and general constitution, his temper was in beastly good condition.' So Hodge remarked, and grew deep yellow, wishing Dirk would fall into the machinery or the sea.

As for Dirk, he regarded it as all in his bond; he would not have chosen this man for a companion any more than the galley-slave can choose his fellow-oarsman. But he was there, so he tried to make the best of it, taking it all as a lesson in endurance, and thinking only with gratitude on the man who had sent him on this mission. It was a slight inconvenience to bear for such a man.

For Mr. Moloch he would have gone on the chain-gang, if it would have served the purpose and made him pleased, far less share the cabin with Hodge Hinderlans.

But Dirk had other cause for grave consideration besides the sad memories of home which occasionally beset him when he was alone—cause for distrust if he had been suspicious, although he pushed doubts aside, with his usual blind trust in the honesty of human nature, as treason to his loyal devotion and faith in his benefactor. When the packages of drawing material had been sent from the office, he found that they were addressed to 'Hinderlans and

Davelock' instead of 'Davelock and Hinderlans,' or 'Davelock' only, if he was, as Mr. Moloch had given him to understand, to be the leader.

Two copies of a letter of instructions had also been handed to him to read by his companion, as soon as he had got over the Biscay Bay sickness, also addressed to Hinderlans and Davelock, with the heading, 'Appendix to Instructions to Artists,' and which read as follows—

'On your arrival at Melbourne you will at once see our Melbourne agent, with whom you will arrange as to the best method of procedure both with regard to your route and to the amount of illustrations it is desirable to give to each state.' With other directions as to getting over the ground in the given time, winding up with the words, 'Let all communications to us come through our Melbourne agent.'

Instructions to him as an artist only, sent out to illustrate the work, without a word of his position as the author; instructions which put him before the Melbourne agent on an equal par only with his companion, or rather the subordinate, seeing that the other had the precedence with the address.

In a few days after this, when Hodge was in another spiteful and taking-down mood, he produced another document which had been confided to his care, marked, 'Copy of Memoranda for our Melbourne Agent.

'The following memoranda are intended for our agent's guidance in arranging for the authorship of the above work.

'He will consider and decide whether it is more desirable to have the entire work done by one writer, or each state treated by a different writer. In arriving at his decision upon this point he will consider whether one well-known name of commanding reputation can be secured, which will ensure for the work a favourable reception at all the different states; or whether the peculiarities and rivalries of the states are such as to render it desirable to entrust each section to some one interested,' etc. etc.

After this followed a detailed plan, drawn from the plans Dirk had so carefully made up during these months of waiting, which came under the mention of instructions to authors, but not a single word, nor hint as to the part which Dirk had been promised.

Was it all an elaborate scheme to suck his brains, and

reduce him to the level of an ordinary workman, without any credit or honour in the end, bound down to those galley-slave conditions for only his salary, with ignominious dismissal at the end?

He wanted to hide his dismay from his churlish companion, so took the paper with him on deck, where, with a boundless sea in front of him, he could think it all over quietly.

Had he, after all, sold himself into bondage for this pitiful price? His writings to be taken without recognition, perhaps his drawings also, bought up with specious word-promises by a liar, and chained down by bonds of iron; for the labour before him was no ordinary labour, and only to be paid for if the Moloch promises were kept, and what bond had he that they would be kept?

As he looked over the deep blue ocean the dark eyes of his wife came before him, and her sweet voice saying, 'For us, Dirk, for us. Make yourself too useful for them to break their promises if they were inclined; do all that you have promised, and let the sin be theirs if they fail.'

It was the angel's voice which had so often spurred him on to noble effort before, and it calmed his turbulent passion. It was too late to doubt the word of Mr. Moloch now, therefore better to trust him to the end than turn back, when his hand was upon the plough.

'He spoke kindly to me, praised my work, said he was sure of me, took my hand and looked at me as an honest man should look. No! no! he cannot be so false as to lure me on to shame, like this, after building me up as he did. I will go on as I promised. I will not heed this lying document; I must believe in Mr. Moloch.'

He was in the toils, and must make the best of it now, for the sake of those at home. Besides, he knew the ground so thoroughly, that he thought their own self-interest would keep them from throwing him off if he did his work well.

He even tried to make excuses for the benefactor who had promised so much. Perhaps he had not yet the power to prevent this document, but would be sure to make it all right, as he said he would; very likely he had sent out private instructions to the agent to recognise him properly, and set things on their right basis. Besides, why was he compelled

to write one hundred pages of foolscap per month, if they were not to be used? Hodge could not possibly take the lead, as he knew nothing of the country, and was too indolent to trouble himself by inquiring anything about it, except the habits and haunts of the snakes, so that he could avoid them. Thus, determined not to meet troubles half-way or spoil the effect of his voyage, Dirk put the paper into his desk and took out his sketch-book instead.

On another occasion, when they were in mid-ocean, and he thought it a good time to post his companion up as to the work before him, Hodge surprised him by saying, 'Plan out for yourself, Dirk; I have nothing to do with plans.'

'But I suppose you will have to fulfil your part of the conditions you signed, will you not?' asked Dirk.

'Conditions! well, I suppose you did sign some conditions, and pretty stiff ones too, the clerks told me, but I signed none, except to stop out as long as they required me for my salary.'

'But you agreed to do a certain amount of drawings, did you not?'

'Not I. I'll work as I did at home, and not hurry myself either.'

'But for the man who sent us out and whose credit depends upon our exertions, Mr. Moloch?'

'Mr. Moloch be hanged! I don't like him well enough to fling my brains away for his advantage—a duffer of a painter as he is. I've come out to Australia to recruit my health,' he said as he turned to the light and settled himself once more into his novel.

Dirk looked at him for a moment and then slowly put up his plans. There was no leader in this concern, and only one thing lay before him, to do his share of the contract if he even wanted his salary. A blank sense of humiliation settled upon him, to be succeeded by a lofty feeling of resignation, which, if it brought some sterner lines to his mouth, gave him calmness. 'I will do what I have promised for the sake of my own word.'

He was not fool enough to delude himself longer with the idea that the work he had projected was to be only his, or that he was otherwise than as a bondsman. But now he

resolved to give them no excuse by insubordination; he would obey orders since he could not command, now that he was committed.

'What a downfall for poor Nell,' he thought. 'Never mind, it may be for the best after all.'

So he tried to console himself and regild the clay feet of this modern god which he had set up to worship, this false idol with the ancient Phœnician name.

By and by they arrived at their destination and appeared before the agent, a kindly man, with a face like Charles Dickens, and a pleasant manner which Dirk took to at once. He welcomed them warmly, but said that he had not yet considered the matter, as he was waiting to see what they had to suggest, but they might just take a day or two to look about them, and perhaps in a week's time they might begin to draw up plans and routes.

To this Dirk objected; remembering the appalling month of work before him, and that *he* could not afford to waste a day.

'Well, I suppose we had better go into it at once, then. Which is the leader of this concern?' looking at Hodge, his name being first on the letter of instructions.

Hodge stood grimly silent, while Dirk waited to give him the chance of saying a generous thing for once since their acquaintanceship.

'Have you any plan to suggest, Mr. Hinderlans?' asked Mr. Garland, the agent.

'No,' muttered Hodge sullenly.

'Have you, then, Mr. Davelock?'

'Yes!' responded Dirk promptly. 'I have my own plans, subject to your alteration.'

'Then I suppose you are the leader, for we must have a leader if we want to get on.'

Dirk waited again, giving Hodge another chance.

'I think you may regard me in that light, if you haven't a better to suggest, as I know the country fairly well,' at length answered Dirk.

'Very well; now we may get on.' The agent turned to give directions for a large map to be brought, after which, while waiting, he looked at Hodge in a curious way, with a half-amused twinkle in his dark-grey eyes.

When the map was spread out Dirk went over it rapidly, pointing with his finger the routes he intended to take, so as to cover the ground in the given time and avoid the rain-season, showing, as he went along, his knowledge of the difficulties before them.

'Capital, nothing could be better, so we will stick to your plan,' said Mr. Garland enthusiastically. 'Now we must think about our author.'

A choking sensation came into Dirk's throat. Mr. Moloch had not contradicted the official memoranda.

CHAPTER II

LETTERS FROM AUSTRALIA

THREE months had crawled along since Helen Davelock's husband had gone away, three months of winter, with the snow and ice still dominant, and no signs of giving way.

Her first quarterly instalment had come to hand promptly to the day, but not a day too soon for her necessities, for the hard winter had made things very dear, and any help which she had received from neighbours had to be paid dearly for. In this nineteenth century friendship has its pecuniary price and value as well as other articles on sale.

Yet all were not wholly mercenary, for the village midwife had nursed her when a girl, and would always help her when she could for nothing, if she saw no prospect of anything to be had; so Nell had clung to her as an old relic of past days in spite of her weakness for strong spirits, whisky being of more value to the old woman than money.

A batch of letters had come to hand from Dirk, her first batch, which banished for the time the hard months she had endured, and sent her flying to communicate the glad tidings to her mother.

'Davelock has arrived all safely, mother.'

'Well, I suppose that's what you expected, wasn't it?' replied the mother coldly, without looking up from her sewing.

'Yes; would you like to hear the letters?'

'By and by will do,' replied the mother, and the elated wife, chilled at the accustomed reception, folded up her letters.

'I wish you would train your children better, Helen, they are a perfect nuisance in the village; and as for that brute of a dog, if you don't shoot it, it will get you into trouble.'

'They don't bother you, I hope, mother?'

'They are always a bother to some one.'

'Love me, love my dog!' responded her daughter with a defiant laugh. These little encounters generally ended in rousing her temper.

However, Tibby, the nurse, was a better listener, particularly if the news were moistened. That day she got a stiff enough glass to make her eyes glisten with emotion over the absent one, whom, indeed, she had always spoken well of.

'I hope the lad is well, and doing well, for he deserves it,' she said; 'and here's to his speedy return.'

'He writes in splendid spirits; it is such a glorious country—all summer. How I wish we were beside him, and away from this ice-cold country,' returned Nell, sitting down to devour her letter once again, and reading aloud passages not too personal.

'My Darling,—The agent received us all right, and is a nice man, ready to take my suggestions, so we are in the thick of work. You know I am careless about money, therefore I have given the purse over to Hinderlans, who is very methodical, and marks down every penny we spend. His sedateness will be a good curb to my own overflowing spirits. Drop a line to Mr. Melgarf, and say that I am very confident. We have a glorious country, if a hot one, to go through, with delightful air to breathe, and frank, hearty people all eager to assist with information. To-morrow I go off to the bush, leaving my companion in town, which he likes best; but the open air for me! No one can die in this country; it is all life and exhilaration, so that it was foolish of me wasting that money insuring my life. Longing unutterably to get your first dear letter, and hear if all goes well with you.'

There was a great deal more in the letter more precious to her, but very foolish in the repetition. Heart-babblings which showed her that she travelled with him always. The next letter was dated three days later. He had got one from her, and wrote as if he were beside her.

'Just a line to-day, as from six in the morning till twelve at night I have to be at work, and even with this have not been able to do what I promised. Yet I think when I get the

sea laziness quite shaken off, I shall be able to work faster and do it. Only, I wish they had given me time to do justice to my work, as my companion has. I must warn you, darling, however, not to build too highly on the position I have to hold with the future work. It has been thought best to have a colonial editor and a staff of writers, so I shall only be one of many. However, the editor here depends upon me, and has not in any way altered my plans. He assures me that I shall be properly recognised; and, after all, perhaps it is better. I may not have such an awful responsibility, for the time is too short for one man to do all the work, so be comforted.'

'Dirk is disappointed, I can read,' thought Mrs. Davelock; 'but it is better, for he will be the sooner home.'

She wearied for him more intensely now, for her second daughter, the handsome Kate, had fallen ill—a cold caught at school, which she did not appear to be able to shake off. For the past four weeks she had been confined to bed, making double work for her mother with the others who had to be got ready for school, and the little one, who was now beginning to climb about and get into all kinds of baby-troubles. Constant work from early morning till late at night, wearing work, with the anxiety of this sick child preying upon her, added to the thought of him so far away.

The dog, also, was a trouble, and her mother was right when she said he ought to be got rid of, not for his own escapades, which were few, but for the sins he was constantly accused of, like Paddy Miles's boy. If a dog barked at a passing carriage, and the authorities complained, then the villagers were always ready to answer that it was Mrs. Davelock's dog 'Tweed' who was the delinquent. He was blamed for all the sheep that were chased, and although he was not entirely guiltless any more than the other dogs, yet they had given him a bad name, and it stuck to him.

Perhaps she would have yielded to the universal force of hatred and sent him away, in spite of her love for animals, only for the friendship which existed between him and the little fairy Bell. He followed her about everywhere, and seemed to understand her baby lispings, obeying her stern, though indistinct commands, as an Oriental slave would obey his master, and guarding her with a jealous eye. With little

Bell he was a grave, decorous attendant, if in his hours of liberty still a thoughtless hobbledehoy of a dog.

What a comfort he was also during the long winter evenings when the children were asleep, and she had a moment to sit down and think. Then he would put his pointed nose between her knees and look up at her with those large, brown, humanely sympathetic eyes as if he shared her griefs, if no one else did. No, she could not part with this solitary sympathiser; the very hatred and ill-will that he had won was an added link in their affections.

Another week of writing and working, and the postman brought another letter from over the sea.

Dirk had succeeded in working up to the allotted number of illustrations.

'After a week of superhuman exertion and nerve-strain I have done my two illustrations per day, and made up for the days I could not manage. I have twenty-four subjects ready for the engraver, and see my way to complete my number up to time at the month's end. Last night I finished my fortnight's supply of MS., but it is labour, and no mistake, for the agent and editor are keeping me up to my bond, and I have to plan out each week's work, write for photos to places where I cannot go myself, answer all business letters, and see provincial editors of papers, so that the work may be well known.

'Hardly a moment to think of love, or to snatch a meal, and at nights horrid dreams of being late for some train, or not up to time with the work, instead of sleep; but I have resolved not to be beaten, and I will not be.

'My companion has at last made up his mind to shift from Melbourne and take Ballarat. He does not like much travelling, as he wishes to save his expenses, so leaves the spending and hard labour to me. I had a lot of persuading before he consented even to do this, for he is nearly always in the sulks about something or other, and affects to despise me, so that I have to yield and let him go his own way for the sake of peace. I tried at first to work beside him, but found that I could not, as he always wanted to do the subject which I had fixed upon, so that I have made up my mind after this to take different routes and keep apart as much as possible. He is a load for any one to carry long in this warm country.

'God keep you all! I feel lighter-hearted since I have conquered my great fear, and see a road out of my difficulties; also, now that I am going out of my *friend's* way, for I can work best by myself when not paralysed by his suggestions, which generally ends in spoiling my effects. My love, my love, all my heart goes out with this letter to you and our children.'

Another long week of worry with the sick girl, who is growing thinner and whiter and more peevish every day; the doctor cannot understand her trouble; also with the dog, whom the villagers have now charged with biting people and horses and worrying sheep.

She knows it is all lies, for she has resolutely made the dog a prisoner since their last charges; but what can she do with her one voice against theirs; already she has had two lawyers' letters threatening her with legal proceedings if she does not have him shot at once.

Poor 'Tweed'! She sits beside him at night cuddling him and crying over his silky head, perplexed and heart-broken. He who would not harm a mouse looks back at her, licking her face, and wondering in his canine mind how best he can comfort her, while the little Bell has to be neglected, and sob herself often to sleep, for the sake of the invalid sister, who lies tossing and moaning, exhausted and burnt-up with her unknown sickness.

And the weekly post brings to her the love-letters filled with hope and affectionate yearnings, yet giving her glimpses of the life out there which half-frighten her. Dirk has always told her everything, and he cannot disguise himself now.

'This has been a week of absolute quiet, for I am in the lonely bush. Up at daybreak and working till I drop asleep at nights. Long tramps in the blazing sun and sleep where I can snatch it; but I mean Mr. Moloch to be proud of his man, and I am doing good work. The editor is delighted both with my pictures and my descriptions, so I am satisfied. He thinks my work more characteristic of the country than my companion's, who will make it *tonish*. Oh, he is an agreeable fellow, and no mistake! I saw him for an hour last week, and he would hardly speak civilly to me, because the colonial papers have been cracking me up. "I can't take up a paper now but I find Dirk Davelock has arrived in so and

so, or departed," said he. It is disgusting, and yet I only do it for the work and Mr. Moloch, and always introduce him where I can.

'Next week I meet him at Ballarat and pack up our first month of work, which I have almost ready; and I think it is good work, for God has heard my cry and given me strength where I thought I must cave in.

'Pray, love, with all your might for the work to be a success, and for Mr. Moloch, who sent me out here.'

CHAPTER III

EXULTATION

IT was almost worth losing the game for, this keen sense of lofty exultation which possessed Dirk as he took his first month's work up to Ballarat. The man had conquered time, and felt almost godlike in his nervous excitement, which to him was like strength.

He felt that he required no sleep, no rest now, for he was upheld by a loftier power, a sense of lightning strength which seemed to be able to cover and encompass any difficulty. This had been his state of mind for the past week and a half, during which he had been producing work as if without an effort.

He had gone through the colony of Victoria, the Lake and western districts, grasping effects as if by photography. His hand flew over the paper almost as quickly as the sunshine, and art problems which might have puzzled him at another time seemed to be all solved by an inner faculty which had for the first time woke up.

He could think upon nothing but his work now: wife, children, meat, sleep, all were pushed aside for the one great inspiration which possessed him; he had not slept an hour for twelve days, and in spite of his bloodshot eyes did not appear to want sleep, for he no longer felt fatigue, as he could no longer see difficulty in anything.

Through the bush he had gone, unheeding the scorching sun, seeking only for illustrations, seeing in every mile a variety, yet noting each phase and change as he drove or rode along for the manuscript which he wrote out each night, a wild fever in his brain until his nervous fingers had completed his two drawings, after which he sought to make up for the lost hours before he had entered into this inspired region of creation.

He felt as if in unity with the angels, as if Nature had become a thing he could address, and which could understand his commands. If he saw a cloud rise, for the rain season was coming near, he would shout his command for it to go back till his work was done, and, to his excited mind, the cloud obeyed him. He spoke to God as to a personality, morning, noon, and night calling on Him aloud in the silent bush to help in the particular sketch which he was then at; and as his brush rushed over it, he watched and wondered, as if he were only an onlooker, seeing the magic work being done.

He had got a task from Mr. Moloch with the same intention that Hercules received his twelve labours, in order to defeat him, but he had called on the aid of God as Hercules did, and the spirits had come down to help him. People wondered at his ceaseless activity as they met him in trains, on board boats, or sitting by the way, as he himself wondered at the quality of his work, for it was good when it ought to have been bad.

Bold effects, and not a stroke nor touch wasted. What he wished to do seemed to come without an effort, while his heart felt as if lapped in flames. The right effect fell over the landscape which he wanted, the exact phrase came to him at night when writing his descriptions. Nothing now could depress his spirits, no amount of exertion fatigue him; he never felt tired, nor hungry, nor thirsty; unseen spirits seemed to administer to him; he covered more than the ground he had planned out each morning to cover before night caught him; he never missed a train, a coach, nor a boat; in fact, he only wished that his task had been harder, so completely had he achieved it. It was twelve days of mental intoxication, which appeared to have taken him out of the range of mortality and raised him to the level of the gods.

He was joyous and pleasant with those he met; editors and reporters laughed at his merry jests, and wrote out glowing accounts of his work, praising him up to the skies. Mr. Moloch had not reckoned upon this unexpected popularity: he found friends where he least expected them, people who wished to enjoy his company; but he rushed on, filled with his mission, leaving them behind, regretful, but filled with admiration. It was like a triumphal march, a brilliant

victory over nature and humanity. One fellow-passenger, who was touring, told him afterwards that he had tried to catch him up all through the colonies, but had always been a night too late—'Dirk Davelock was here yesterday; splendid fellow'; each town and station could talk of nothing else. So he came upon Hodge Hinderlans, sulking and brooding in Ballarat, with about half a dozen sketches more or less done.

'I wouldn't send off such a batch,' Hodge growled as he saw the sixty-four drawings; 'it looks bad.'

'It's in my contract, and I'll have to do it. But come, old fellow, let me help you to sort up yours, so that we may catch the mail to-morrow.'

'Sort them if you like, I'm going to bed,' snarled Hodge.

So Dirk sat up and made the two packages ready for the mail, writing out the titles and the double list. A bath was all he wanted before breakfast next morning, as he intended to start by an early train.

'Do you never sleep?' asked Hodge, as he appeared just in time for breakfast.

'Not much lately,' answered Dirk, laughing, 'but I intend to have a two days' rest now before starting my next month's work.'

At this moment their attention was attracted by the entrance of a newly married couple, evidently upon their honeymoon, for they came in hand in hand, he sheepish-looking, and she blushing. Dirk looked at them with a smile and a sigh, remembering his own early days.

'I hate that clown,' muttered Hodge savagely.

'Why?' asked Dirk, astonished. 'Do you know him?'

'No, except that they have been three days here, and always come in that way.'

'But why do you hate him?'

'Because he looks so accursedly content and happy with the woman.'

'Hodge, my boy, if I were you I'd take a couple of Beecham's pills; they are good for the bile, and you seem in a bad way.'

Two hours afterwards he had said good-bye to his genial companion, feeling as if he had been released from prison.

CHAPTER IV

BELL'S DOG 'TWEED'

TROUBLES were thickening at Applewait, the village where Helen Davelock was waiting on her husband's return.

One morning the village policeman brought an important missive from one of the local magnates, couched as follows—

'MADAM,—As Mr. Davelock is from home, I address myself to you. If your dog is not at once sent away or shot, I must take an interdict out to protect my property.—Yours, etc. JOHN CHURLSON, Hurtleburn.'

The property referred to was about a quarter of an acre, upon which this great man starved a couple of sheep.

Helen was in a fearful state of mind over the letter, and as she did not know what an interdict meant, the vagueness of the threat terrified her all the more.

'What has he done?' she inquired breathlessly of the policeman.

'Worried Mr. Churlson's sheep yesterday.'

'But he has been tied up for a week, so it could not have been he.'

'That's no matter, ma'am. There's half a dozen witnesses can swear they saw him do it, so that you haven't any hope of your word being taken.'

After the policeman went away she rushed up to her father and mother for advice, which they gave her in the same spirit as the letter from Mr. Churlson. 'He must be shot, or you'll get interdicted to a certainty.'

'Interdicted!' It might mean imprisonment or execution. No one thought it necessary, or could explain the awful

term, although every one said that Mr. Churlson was not at all likely to let her off with anything less than the law would grant him.

'He took a hundred pounds damages from Widow Smith last week for not one quarter as much'; and at this dire information respecting the habits of this gold ogre her heart sank into her boots.

Then she went to the cow-feeder and village oracle who supplied her with milk—the only one who did not abuse her dog.

'Keep your mind easy; a dog is always allowed his first bite, and they cannot interdict you; it is your husband they would have to do it to, and he is away, so you are safe.'

'What is an interdict, Mr. Lockyard?'

'An interdick'—the oracle scratched his head for a moment—'there is no other name for it except interdick. But you are safe, take my word for it.'

She was glad to take his word, and returned home to the condemned culprit a trifle easier in her mind.

Hardly, however, had she got inside, when a knock came to the door, and upon opening it, she found herself face to face with a white-haired shepherd, while round the corner she noticed about a dozen peeping, shaggy heads of shepherds of all ages. They had chosen this veteran as their representative.

Very stern and resolute the old man appeared as he stood bolt upright, while 'Tweed' came out the length of his rope, and reaching up, began to lick at his hand.

When the old man saw this his face softened, and he said, in an astonished tone—

'Is that the dog who gets the awful name?'

'It is my dog, if you mean that.'

'So that's the dog that has done all the mischief, is it? Gosh, but he is a nice beast, and a good-looking one into the bargain.'

'Yes, he is a nice dog.'

'A fine fellow,' stroking 'Tweed' as he spoke, 'with a kindly eye in his head; but, for all that, it's going to get you into any amount of trouble, for they've set themselves against him; so take my advice and send him away, for he is too good to shoot.'

She felt grateful for the old man's advice, for she could see that he had come with the intention of laying some complaint, but had been turned from his purpose by the dog himself, whom he could judge from his lifelong knowledge of collies.

'Thank you, I will send him away.'

As she came out to shake hands with the old man, two or three of the heads bobbed out, while the owners exclaimed—

'A fine dog, mistress, and too good to shoot.'

One gay young spark capped the remark by adding—

'A fine dog, but the mistress is finer. I would not mind taking them both.'

Helen laughed at the sally, and they all went off to report that the dog had been maligned; but still shouted back 'that she would have to send him away.'

'Tweed' had been found guilty and condemned by all; and, therefore, if she wished to save his life she would have to banish him, so she sat down with a heavy heart to write and ask if a farmer cousin of hers would care for him enough to give him a home and train him to a useful life.

While she wrote 'Tweed' sat at her side pressing his head against her knee, and with a mute appeal in his rich eyes against the injustice of his doom. This day he would not look at his tiny mistress Bell, who vainly tried to attract his attention by tumbling over him and tugging at his coat; there was too much of a presentiment of coming trouble upon his mind for him to give way to frivolity.

This country cousin lived twenty miles away, so that the reply came the next evening. 'Yes, he would be very glad of the dog; if she would send him over by train he would take him in and be kind to him.'

How to send him was the next question; the policeman had been apprised that the malefactor was to be banished next day, and was deputed to see him off safely; and as she could not go herself, she persuaded one of the villagers, who worked for her brother, to go over by paying his wages for the day lost. This her brother insisted upon before he would let the man go, for at that time she was at a decided discount amongst her own kin.

The hour of his departure had come, and a wild good-bye it was: mother and children weeping, from the eldest to the little Bell, who, understanding that something was wrong,

although she could not quite fathom what it was, joined in the general outcry.

Truly a house of lamentation, with the hero bearing himself with silent dignity through it all. Often had he howled with dismay when left alone, or yelped over his convictions when he had yielded to a moment of temptation and the weakness of depraved original nature; but neither howl nor yelp broke from his overcharged heart that day. He listened to what his mistress had to say with steadfast eyes, looked round upon the tear-besmudged faces of his young friends, stooped for a moment to lick the rosy cheeks of his little mistress, and then permitted himself to be dragged away from their midst, in silence on his part, with a drooping tail and backward glance.

'So that is the last of my only friend,' murmured Mrs. Davelock, as she stood at the door watching the retreating black-and-tan captive as his jailers dragged him through the snow.

He was gone, and a death seemed to have taken place. 'Let me hear how he likes his new home,' she had written.

The policeman conveyed them to the station, and did not lose sight of 'Tweed' until the train steamed out. When the man returned that night he reported that 'Tweed' caused him no trouble after getting into the train, but had sat under the seat the whole way with his nose on the ground, and at the termination of the journey walked quietly after him to the farmhouse, where they had shut him into a disused barn with plenty of straw and meat, so that he was very comfortable. 'They will keep him tied up for two or three days till he is used to his new friends and quarters.'

On the third day a letter arrived telling her that 'Tweed' was going on all right, had eaten heartily, and was already great friends with them all at the farm, and did not appear to mourn at his separation from his old friends.

'So this is the fidelity of dogs, is it?' thought Mrs. Davelock, feeling a little bitter that 'Tweed' could forget so easily. 'In dog, as in man or woman, it is the same all the world over; a little longer with some more than others, but time cures all griefs.' It was better for himself that he should bear the parting lightly, but for all that it was a sad disappointment and upset many of her hopeful theories.

She was mistaken, however, in her conclusions about this friend, for two hours afterwards a telegram arrived with the terse words, '"Tweed" has bolted, letter will explain,' which caused her heart to beat more warmly, although, as she looked out at the bleak, frozen winter landscape, she thought with horror on the fate in store for her poor, young, thoughtless dog.

That night brought the explanatory letter. Thinking him quite reconciled they had taken him out for a little exercise.

'He is a cunning beast,' wrote the cousin, 'for he fawned upon me, as if I was the only master he had ever had, until I let him go free. Even then he gambolled about and followed closely behind, without a thought of anything else seemingly; until all at once, when I least expected it, he darted from me straight up the hill. Thinking he had smelt a rabbit I watched him for a bit, then seeing that he was going beyond call I whistled on him to come back. But no, he had his own purposes to follow out, for he went straight on without looking back, up the snow-covered hillside until he reached the top, where I saw him stop for a minute or two clear against the sky sniffing the air with his nose up.

'I doubt if he will be able to find his way home again, for no dog could possibly scent Applewait twenty miles off, over the hills and through the valleys with that heavy snow underfoot. But he certainly picked up a scent of some sort, for the last I saw of him was as he disappeared over the ridge in your direction. Tell me if he comes home, for if he does then he is the cleverest dog of his kind I ever saw. I would never let him go again, if I were you, though all the magistrates in the countryside tried to make me; but I fear he will be frozen to death long before he can find his road.'

'Never again will I part with my brave dog if he can only live to reach me,' vowed Helen fervently, while she looked at the gloomy, snow-laden clouds with a doubt of foreboding.

Two long days and nights passed, while the snow came down in large flakes, drifted heavily, and froze up like iron again upon the trees, now nearly covered up to their lower

branches in parts with those repetitions of snowstorms and freezing intervals.

Between Applewait and the other village where her cousin dwelt spread a desolate waste of mountain scenery, with hardly a house between.

'Poor "Tweed," he is dead and buried up in some snow-drift by this time'; and thinking this, she went about her dreary duties with a very heavy heart.

Another day without a sign, and then she gave him up entirely, and sat down to write the melancholy news to her husband.

The children from school had just finished supper, and were warming themselves at the fire, when she began her letter, and she had just got to the most tragic part of it, when her sick daughter Kate cried out, 'Mother, there is some one at the door trying to open it.'

Down dropped her pen, while she got up from her chair; yes, there was a sound outside like scratching, and with a wondering half-hope she hastily flung the door open to admit the despaired-of wanderer, who limped wearily inside holding up his frozen, ice-clogged paws to show them all how badly he was.

'"Tweed"! "Tweed"!!' they were all round the lost friend, cuddling his shaggy snow-covered coat and dragging him to the fire. Yes, he had found them out despite of all difficulties, done his twenty miles, and who knows how many more of hill and valley, through the snowdrifts and wild country; deceived his captors to make his escape and rejoin those who had exiled him from home.

Helen understood it all, and saw it all, as if he had described his adventures, as he stood there whimpering before them with the hard ice and snow-clumps melting out of his mane with the heat of the fire, while she knelt beside him and tried to take the ice-spikes out from between his cracked and swollen toes. She saw that he had tasted nothing since he started from the famished look in his sunken eyes and the fleshlessness of his bulging ribs; also how wearied he was when he tried vainly to lick her hand, for he was almost past lapping up the warm milk she put before him. 'No, we will never more part, my poor, brave martyr,' she sobbed as she realised it all. The panting effort to get on, the times he

had been driven back by the fearful drift and pitiless blast, the mute despair which must have seized upon his affectionate heart as night after night closed upon him. Famishing and cold, each mile becoming longer as he grew more wearied and faint, while his cut and swollen paws were tortured with those sharp spikes of ice.

The retreat from Moscow. Something like it to those who adored their emperor, or as an incident she had heard of once in her grandmother's life when she had tramped all night through the snow to get at her daughter, Helen's own mother, who had been sick. Such sublime devotion died out in humanity with the advent of railway-carriages and warming-pans. People can get too easily about now to trouble themselves to move at all, for the sake of kindness or pity only.

Amongst 'Tweed's' most inveterate enemies was the village butcher, whose animosity originated from his wanting to purchase him cheaply, and who had thought to get him at his own price by decrying him. Next morning, while Tweed was still sleeping off his fatigue, this man accosted Mrs. Davelock as she was passing his shop.

'So that awful brute has come home again?'

'Yes, Jamie,' replied she sternly, 'and I intend to keep him in spite of you all.'

'But ye dare not. Think of the interdict.'

'I know who abused him all through.'

'Not me, Mrs. Davelock,' said Jamie, retreating hastily, for he was a great coward, and she was looking at him fiercely, her dark eyes glowing with a most appalling light.

'Yes, it was you; but I tell you what, if you try to force him again from me, I'll kill myself and him also, and after that haunt you, Jamie, to your dying day.'

'Oh Lord! oh Lord! don't do that,' and Jamie put up both hands with a blanched face of horror at the dire threat, for he was a firm believer in ghosts.

'Then see that you leave him alone,' she muttered as she passed from him with the words, and it was fully ten minutes before the terrified butcher could gasp out, 'Mercy on me, it's awful; I always liked the beast, and would very *willingly give five shillings* for it, if she would not be so obstinate.'

So after this the dog 'Tweed' was tolerated in the village for the wonder of his return, and the unusual horror that the mistress had inspired when Jamie told all his customers that she had threatened to make a ghost of herself. They had already too many ghosts in this village to be able to afford another one.

CHAPTER V

DEPRESSION

ANOTHER month had rolled by like a well-oiled express train at full speed, and again the stipulated amount of work had been packed and sent off by Dirk Davelock, with one day only gained; still it was a gain which meant much under the circumstances.

His mental experiences during this month had been very curious and alarming. First the high-tensioned state which rendered him so acute and accurate in his artistic perception, and which made him see details in a swift glance which might otherwise have escaped his notice, also a strange tendency to idealise the commonest objects and see odd resemblances in them. For instance, during a half-hour's walk, while waiting on his train at Ballarat, at one point he looked down upon an old quarry with the pit framework standing up, the city beyond, and, farther on, the distant ranges softly outlined against the glowing morning sky.

The sun was pouring down shafts of light amongst the pearly haze, while over on the distant hill-top stood three dead gum-trees or pit frames together. While sketching this scene the curious impression came upon him that he was sketching Jerusalem nineteen hundred years ago; that the old quarry with the mounds of crushed quartz-powder about were the graves of the risen. The slated roofs grew to domes, with that silver light, while the hill beyond was the veritable Golgotha with the crosses erected and waiting for their human loads. In the train, however, after he had parted with Hodge, objects began to grow vague to him and uninteresting. It was not the most interesting route he could have taken between Ballarat and Sandhurst, but he felt for the first time a mental numbness creeping

upon him, a torpor that made him let things slip even while he noted them listlessly.

'I will see them on the return journey,' he thought, calculating that he could afford to take a holiday after his past exertion.

At Sandhurst he bought some photographs, but could not fix upon any spot to sketch; he began one or two, but his pencil trailed off into meaningless lines, while his enthusiasm flagged.

At Echuca the conversation of a fellow-traveller amused him for a little time. He was a young larrikin who had been up to every dodge and trade, and who asked him innumerable questions, while as freely imparting all his own efforts to hunt fortune. He had never tried the fine arts beyond coach-painting, the job he was going after now; he had seen an advertisement for a coach-painter, and had applied and got it, and was now going up to fulfil his engagement.

'But you have tried to paint coaches before, have you not?' inquired Dirk.

'Never touched a brush in my born life, but I am quick at learning, you see, so that I shall be able to do it all right about the time that the boss finds me out and sacks me, then I can take a job anywhere. Colonial experience, you see, this is.'

The unbounded confidence of this youth restored Dirk's flagging spirits and ebbing pluck, and he made some good work next morning along the Goldburn and Murray rivers.

From here he got a telegram from the editor to meet him in five days' time at Melbourne, as he thought it well to send him to New Zealand before finishing Victoria.

'What a waste of time and money,' thought Dirk as he got this message. In his plans New Zealand came into the homeward route, when the rain season there would be past; however, he had no option except to obey orders now that he had abnegated his own personality in the matter. The tidings woke him up, however, for he must make up during the five days for the fortnight which would be lost at sea and the wet days which he foresaw would be before him in Maoriland.

'Fifteen days crammed into five.' The cloud lifted from

his mind as he thought of this, and then he went at it furiously, a savage desire to beat time taking the place of the former easy pleasure, while his brain felt now as if enclosed in an iron band, and his heart grew pained with the exertion. He kept up his flagging energies by repeating the names of his wife and his benefactor, Mr. Moloch. 'There will be time for me to recruit on board the New Zealand boat,' he thought, so that he kept his appointment up to time with a portfolio filled with pictures in advance.

He was received warmly by the editor and agent, who began with an apology for taking him away before he was done with the route.

'We did not reckon on the rain season until your letter came to remind us of it. After this I shall not interfere with your plans,' observed the editor to Dirk.

'Then we have not to go to New Zealand to-morrow?'

'No, work as you first planned out; we cannot improve upon your plan.'

'Then I will take north now and go to New South Wales, leaving my companion to take the towns, as he likes those, and on his return journey take the Alps and the Lake District.'

'That will do. Then I suppose we shall not see you for the next three or four months?'

'No. I shall send my work to you as regularly as I can reach postal towns, so that we had best arrange now for the rest of the time I am away.'

They sat down and went over the map again carefully, Dirk leaving to the editor the task of informing Hodge where to go, so that they might not visit the same places.

'I would like you to do the Lake District and Alps if you could possibly manage them,' said the editor; 'I can depend upon you, if you undertake it, more than Mr. Hinderlans.'

'Very well,' replied Dirk, flattered that his work should be preferred to that of the young man's who sneered at and criticised so constantly.

Amongst Dirk's original plans had been an inland tour of the north of Queensland, something on the lines of Burke and Wills, and other explorers; the editor next reverted to that.

'This desert-march which you once proposed would certainly be of the greatest advantage to the work; but will it be discreet to take it alone, Mr. Davelock, for Mr. Hinderlans says distinctly that he won't go?'

'I suppose not,' responded Dirk. 'Discretion has not been much in my programme since I started this job, so if it will advantage the work, I am willing to try it after I am done with the rest.'

'But there are dangers in it.'

'I suppose cattle-drivers often make the attempt and succeed, and I don't see why I should not also.'

'Very well,' observed the editor quietly. 'You are plucky; only be careful of yourself, and I trust you will give a good account of your adventures four months after this.'

The agent here broke in with an eye to business in his particular department.

'You have been very successful with the country papers; do you not think that you could manage to get us some notices in the city papers while you are here? I cannot get at them this side at all.'

'I'll try,' answered Dirk; and forthwith he set about his task for the rest of the day. He called at the different offices, saw the editors, explained the intention of the work, and never left them without their promise to give an intimation of the projected work. Some of them objected at first for the sake of the firm. 'If you represented any other house than the one you do, we would not hesitate a moment; but Grabbleson and Co. haven't a very good name this side, I can tell you.'

Dirk, however, warmed to his subject, and persuaded them even against their inclinations, so that he was able to gladden the agent's soul with the assurance that his book would be intimated to the public in due course, after which he departed on his journey, happy that he was at last quite alone.

Through the lakes of Gippsland and over the Alps by way of Omeo he went, working hard amidst glorious scenery and mighty gorges, accustoming himself by hard riding and rough fare for the desert journey before him. A fortnight passed in this way, sketching and writing by day while his horse rested, sleeping in the open air at night.

Sometimes he saw snakes, black and tiger-snakes whose bites were fatal; and once he succeeded in killing a large carpet-serpent. It was a fortnight of perfect solitude and endurance, until at last he came to signs of civilisation: the bush shanty first, then the small homesteads of selectors; and finally he found his way over the borders of New South Wales, with snow-clad Mount Kosiosco behind him, and could stretch his wearied limbs on a bed once again, while his horse munched hay in the stables.

Day after day he had been toiling along or climbing up the mountain-passes with a mind horribly depressed. He went through the work, but it was in a mechanical, apathetic way which surprised him, with those grand, soul-inspiring surroundings. He remembered them all afterwards acutely enough—the broad lakes with their thronging legions of bird-life, the black swans covering the little lochs and sedge-protected inlets, the huge rollers which came in at the lakes' entrances; those distant Alps reflecting over the smooth waters and wooded rivers where the bell-bird beat his soft peal; those mighty precipices up which he zigzagged, with the shady gorges underneath his horse's hoofs; dangerous tracks, where a loose stone or a false step would have sent them rolling down a full half-mile of space into the rocky gullies; long reaches of mountain scenery, where the full moon rose over the distant ridges and multiplied her silver lustre in the far-away freshness and depths of that ever-rushing Snowy River; ravishing pictures of beauty and mystery where the heavy night-dews hung on the bush-spiders' webs upon the near branches, while the wombat, walloby, and wild-cat came out to play near his lair as he crouched under the shelving cliffs and watched their frolics; with the dashing from tree to tree of the flying-foxes and wombats, while the rugged landscape beyond swam in tender tones of grey.

He marvelled at his present apathy, while he contrasted it with his late activity and decision, letting all this wealth of Nature slip from his fingers as the days slid from him; wondered even with a growing horror which kept him awake and hungry, for the inspiration and strength which had left him all void and desolate.

A horror of failure in this hard contract which had sapped his brain-juices and spinal force, failure which he dare not

contemplate in all its dire results to him and the dearly loved ones at home; thoughts which made him prick up his jaded horse at the most dangerous declivities, and wish that it might stumble, and so end all the misery.

Once he was treading the edge of a cliff with five hundred feet of smooth rock-face, and a depth below that again which dissolved into blue haze. As he leaned over his horse's neck he could see a shimmer of water far below—the Dargo River. What was there to prevent him taking the fatal plunge? A prick of the spurs on the off-side, and the deed was done. Then, as he brooded, a tender vision of that house in Applewait darted before him, with the woman who would mourn him for a while, and the children who would, perhaps, be better off without him in the future.

'Ah!' His waterproof overcoat had slipped over the horse's neck, and was now fluttering like a stone-tinted moth down into that mystery of haze, lost for ever. With a shudder he woke from his evil dream, and watched it until it became lost to sight in the awful depth; then he pricked up his horse, and dashed all tremblingly past the tempting danger. Better a dead failure than blank oblivion like this.

He expected to make a good supper and enjoy a sound sleep when he reached the little inn, after his past fortnight of fatigue and indifferent fare, but at the first mouthful he felt sick and unable to proceed; and after the first sensation of cool contact from the sheets had passed away, he tossed about from side to side, turning his pillows at every moment, with his burning eyeballs piercing the blackness of the night with insomnious pricking pain.

The room felt crammed with spectres; myriads of fire-sparks and golden rings grew into shape and collapsed as he glared into that darkness, looking at lurid specks of scarlet enlarging to yellow circles which whirled with lightning velocity, like St. Catherine's wheels, before they silently exploded, while others took their places; an awful spectacle of demoniac fireworks.

Were his brains giving way? He could hear distant sounds outside with terrible distinctness. The tinkle of a grazing bullock's bell sounded like a near fire-alarm gong. A late traveller passing along the roadway sounded like a

charge of cavalry, he following the tramp, tramp along the road, marking where the heels struck against the stones, mile after mile, as if they would never cease. His watch under the pillow rang out its jewelled beats as if a sledge-hammer was striking upon a steel wedge inserted into his heart. He rose and buried the watch inside his spare shirt, then shut it within the distant chest of drawers; yet still he could hear it beat! beat!! beat!!! with that steel-like ring which seemed to be splitting his heart in two.

At last he could stand no more of it, so sprang up, and drawing on his clothes, opened his window, and looked out to the wonderful studded vault overhead. The gaunt gum-trees, dead and leafless, started out from the darkness like the whitened limbs of skeletons; the croaking of the frogs irritated his dried nerves; the distant bullock-bell maddened him with neuralgic shafts of pain. He must move about since he could not get silence, so he dropped from the open window into the backyard, then over the iron-bark fence, and along the road he rushed—vainly seeking to escape from the sounds which cut through him like dagger-stabs.

Backwards and forwards he sped like a caged dingo all through that sounding night, a growing terror possessing him, a terror of himself, fearful of the darkness, yet dreading the coming day, a concentration of horror which seemed to be urging him back to that room again where his loaded revolver lay nestling in his hold-all.

How terrible seemed this monster Nature, with her thousand suggestive voices, and her octopus claws which seemed to be drawing him into her clutches. Oh for a human voice to banish the other voice, the homely bark of a dog, something more definite than what he felt and heard on every side of him through that awful night.

At length the morning dawned, and fearful lest any one would come out and see this madness written upon his face, he crept back to the window and in again. As the light strengthened, he looked into his glass to see the change of a night, and was astonished that he looked no worse: a red, sun-fired face, with features swollen and bloodshot eyes, and with veins at the side of his temples outstarting and quivering —that was all.

He filled his basin with water, and buried his head in it,

feeling a little better for the moment, although his limbs were so trembling and weak that he could hardly stand upright, with a terrible nausea at his stomach, which made him loathe the thought of breakfast.

By and by he heard the servants moving about, and then he sought the kitchen, making an excuse that he was cold, for intruding upon them.

He spoke to the woman who was lighting the fire; then, as she looked at him a little curiously, he became suspicious lest she should see what he felt; indeed, he thought she was looking at him, as if afraid.

'Is there a doctor here about? I don't feel very well to-day.'

'You don't look well, sir, and the doctor lives down the road, the first house you come to.'

'Far off?'

'About a mile; it's a nice walk; you ought to go and see him at once.'

'Isn't it too early?'

'Oh, no; he is an early riser.'

The woman wished to get rid of him; he felt she was afraid of him. So he mumbled out his thanks, and went out into the fresh air.

'That chap's going to see snakes, you bet,' observed the kitchen-maid to the old ostler, who, at the moment, came in with an armful of cut wood.

'Been going it, I guess,' he returned.

Down the Bush-track Dirk went, quickening his steps as he went, until the trees seemed to be flying past him; and very soon he was at the doctor's house, and knocking at the door rapidly and loudly.

'Hallo! what's up?' asked the doctor, as he came to the door in his shirt and trousers, his servant not yet being up.

'I want to consult you, sir,' answered Dirk. 'I don't feel well.'

'Ah! come in.'

The doctor, rough in his manner as a bullock-driver, led the way into his surgery, and pulling up the blind, turned to scrutinise his patient. He had not many troubles to fight against in this part of the world—a case of midwifery, or

D.T.'s; his present visitor being a male, he promptly concluded it was the latter trouble which affected him.

'Been drinking rather heavily lately, I see?'

'No, doctor.'

'Let 's look at your tongue.'

Dirk put out his tongue, and held out his hand.

'Hum, very bad case,' muttered the doctor, ignoring his denial. They all did the same.

'But I have not tasted anything except water for the past fortnight.'

'Took much before that?'

'No!'

'Then what the dickens have you been doing with your blamed constitution?'

Then Dirk told him of his anxiety and overstrain, upon which the doctor opened his eyes.

'But you cannot do that amount of work, you know, you are only human, and no man alive could do it.'

'I must.'

'Then you will go mad before another week, unless you do as the Chinese do, take opium.'

'I won't do that either, doctor; can you give me anything else to keep me up for the year?'

'Yes, I might, but you will suffer afterwards.'

'I don't care, so that I finish what I am at.'

'Very well, only keep your mind easier or you will lose your reason. Here are half-a-dozen pills, and a sleeping-draught; take these, two at a time; that is, go back to your inn, get a hot sitz-bath, take two of the pills after that, and this draught, then go to bed. I'll see you when you wake.'

Dirk followed the directions given, and enjoyed twenty-four hours' heavy sleep, waking up with a bad headache, but feeling more composed, to see the doctor at his bedside puffing at a well-blackened clay pipe.

'You feel some better to-day?'

'Yes,' said Dirk, 'I feel all right.'

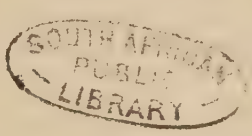
'Then stay in bed to-day and to-morrow, and don't try to eat till you are inclined. Meanwhile, take a dose of this mixture every four hours, and the pills until they are done Don't think of your work, and you may be able to do it.'

'Thank you, doctor. You have saved my life.'

'Well, I think I have at least saved your reason; only whenever you feel worried take the medicine as directed. I leave you the prescription, and wish you success in your undertaking, which I don't envy you.'

When the doctor left, Dirk lay and read the prescription until he fell once more asleep—a strong mixture it was, suited to his constitution and the emergencies of the case, in which *Potass-Bromide*, *Iron*, *Strychnine*, *Morphia*, and *Glycerine*, played important parts.

He stayed six days at the village, resting the two that the doctor had ordered, after which he finished his month's allowance, and, packing them off, started off once more on his journey. It was no longer enthusiasm which kept him up now, but this country doctor's prescription.


LIBRARY

CHAPTER VI

LITTLE BELL

THE last heap of snow had at length melted from the hill-sides of Applewait, and the children could enjoy themselves after they came from school on the stream-banks and flowering road-sides.

A long winter, which had lasted right on to the end of June, when many of the old people had died hard, as village old age generally does, and many of the younger ones wished they could die also, and thus finish up the lingering months of slow starvation.

But the sun was once more shining, and had softened the soil, so that Earth's sons could work and eat, while the branches put on their tardy summer costumes of white, pink, and green, and the buttercups and daisies spangled the grass fields, while from the covered thicket came the sounds of courting and rejoicing.

The children were able to roll about and play, therefore they were happy; all except the little sick Katie, who lay in her close room above the butcher's, for they had been compelled to leave the cottage which they had first taken, as the landlord wanted to rebuild. Their present quarters were close, stuffy, and up an outside stair; not a nice place for an invalid, but the only place Mrs. Davelock could secure in the village.

'You ought to force that child to get up,' said her mother to Helen. 'I'm sure she is only pretending to be ill.'

She hadn't been to see the pretender, although the child had been lying for the past four months only a few doors from her own house. Meanwhile the clever Kate had sat up in bed when she could, making deft little things with her crotchet or knitting needles, working restlessly, whenever

she gathered a little strength, at birthday presents, afterwards to lie exhausted and worn, with pinched white face, and limbs, once chubby and stout, now like a shrivelled mummy for thinness, and with great hollow eyes which looked out most wistfully at the blue sky, wondering why she was ill, as her mother sometimes wondered what they had all done to be thus punished by Heaven.

'I prayed last night that I might be better this morning, mamma, but I feel worse instead of better. I prayed for fifty times "Our Father which art in Heaven," before I fell asleep; but do you know I think I must have wearied Him praying so much, that He never pays any attention to me.'

'Hush, Katie, perhaps He means something better, and wiser by you when He keeps you still in bed.'

'No, mamma, He cannot mean that, for it is not wise to be ill. It is wiser and better to be out like my brothers and sisters in the fields, than lying here growing cross and wicked because I cannot rise. But perhaps God is too busy just now looking after other little girls to heed me, and then He gets angry when I pray so often.'

'He is never tired of hearing prayer.'

'Then if He can hear, why should He listen so long without replying?'

'I don't know, dear,' replied the poor mother, her own aching heart echoing the peevishness of her sick daughter's cry.

It seemed so long, so long, to have to wait and cry on those gates of Heaven to open. This girl, the cleverest of her flock, so eager to live, who enjoyed health so much when she had it, to watch her daily struggles and listen to her constant prayers for life.

Her sisters and brothers generally lingered on the way home from school to gather flowers to decorate the sick-room, and the little Bell would toddle in and out all day long with fragments of weeds intermingled with garden roses, which she had begged from the neighbours, for her sister, who could not go out to gather or beg them for herself.

The little woman, Bell, as all the neighbours called her, made friends for herself wherever she went, carrying her thirty months with great dignity and independence, even although, as yet, rather reckless with her feet.

When her father departed, she had not emerged from the somewhat uninteresting stage of babyhood, and he had been too harassed to notice much of her, beyond that she had cut most of her teeth, possessed blue eyes, a little snub nose, and a top covering like finely-combed flax. But to the mother's far-reaching intuition she had innumerable other points and qualities of striking interest to commend her to even the most casual onlooker. Yet these were the main points, with a faculty for falling over things, and breaking both her own little nose, and whatever else she could get hold of that was breakable.

Dirk had drawn her once as she stood amongst her wreckage of plates and cups, with her resolute white head bent downward, as she burrowed in the basket which she had fished out from some recess with her busy little fingers; a sturdy little figure with the clothes all rumpled about her soft, white, fleshy neck, and a general air of work about her which was irresistible.

In those days she had been all her anxious mother's care, and many a wild fright the little maid had given her before she could be extricated from her constant perilous predicaments. But this winter, she had perforce been left more to her own devices, and in consequence, therefore, had developed habits of self-reliance, and made acquaintances outside her own domestic circle.

As she became more steady upon her legs she could not be kept at home at all, but would be seen at all hours, like a regular *gamin*, in the road, much to the disgust of her very correct grandparents, with hands and pinafore besmudged sometimes, although, as a rule, she was very dainty, but always without a hat, and with the one unruly golden lock hanging over her brow.

Just missing the wheels of passing carriages; if the driver knew her, he spoke fairly to her, when she would turn and get out of his way with a merry laugh. But if he was a stranger and called out crossly, then little Bell would get up her back and stand doggedly in the centre of the walk, so that this discourteous coachman, who could not comprehend and honour this two-and-a-half-year old importance, had to back and go round her, for she would not budge.

'I never saw such an obstinate wench,' said her grand-

mother, and to her and her grandfather she was most obstinate, and unbending as iron. No one had ever seen her put her foot inside their doorway, although she haunted the hearths of all the other villagers, at least those whom she condescended to honour.

She was a democrat of democrats, and would pass by the purse-proud and well-off with lofty disdain, to roll her flaxen curls on the rag hearth of the cottager whom she could patronise. Some of her girl friends she would embrace, and some she would keep at a proper distance with, 'You no touch me, di'ty Tilly—me no tiss you.'

'Ah! you kiss Tilly,' the mother would say.

'Me no tiss Tilly,' she would reply, with quiet but very lofty disdain, 'Tilly di'ty.'

There was one old woman, who kept a small grocer and toy shop in the village, who sometimes gave her credit. When she had a penny she would spend it there, but if she hadn't cash she would say, 'Put it down to mammy,' with cool confidence.

'Me want dolly, Gall.'

'Where's your penny, my woman?'

'Me no got penny to-day, but mammy will pay it.'

'Well, there's one for you.'

'No! me no like 'at one, show me them all.' And the tiny customer would make the gaunt widow turn over her stock and gravely survey them until she got her own choice.

'She's the cleverest in this world,' Mrs. Gall would say to the grandmother, who sometimes chanced to come in when the little maid went out with her treasure, each passing the other like strangers.

'A forward, obstinate wench,' replied the irate grandmother. 'You should not encourage her, Mrs. Gall.'

'Na! na! she's the bonniest and the cleverest grand-bairn ye have.'

Mrs. Gall had a son who had lately lost his young wife. They had been very fond of one another, and her death had been a very painful one, so that often the young widower, when he came home from work, would lay himself down on the sofa and cry about his lost bride. Sometimes Bell would steal in gently and, cuddling her bonny head into the bereaved young man's face, would say, 'You no cry, Tom,

Bell is here.' Then Tom would take her in his arms and kiss her and forget half his grief; so the obstinate one made for herself two devoted champions in the widow and her wifeless son.

'My papa on the sea,' she would proudly remark. 'He bring me dolly in big ship.'

Every morning when her mother rose, she went over to the cradle where Bell lay, to see if she were safe, and then she would bend down to kiss her before going about her household duties. On these occasions Bell was generally awake, but knowing that she would not be wanted just yet, would pretend to be asleep, until her mother's lips touched her fat, soft arm, or leg, which she could not resist, then she would peep up with her forget-me-not eyes and say, 'Tiss Bell again, mamma.'

The starling, always the first to wake of the household, would look on this performance with wide open black eyes, and then utter shrilly, 'Most extraordinary!' as if he marvelled at such a display of weakness in poor flesh-loving humanity, Dick, the starling, being an old cynic and a most confirmed bachelor.

Then the fire would be lighted, and the dog would wake, and, with a lazy yawn, get up and lick his little mistress's chubby hand, hanging over the crib; and shortly afterwards the milkman would wake 'Snodjy' the white cat, and soon all would be commotion, the elders to get ready for school, and the sick one murmuring at the noise, while the mother bustled about and tried to keep order.

Then as soon as the others were packed off, little Bell's turn would come to be got up, washed, and dressed. 'Tweed' waiting with exemplary patience until she was ready for their daily round of visits, and until her mother had made her like a summer wild-flower, to go out and conquer all hearts excepting those of her grandparents. And how proudly she went forth with her clean pinafore and her pretty frock, but with her unruly hair always in a tangle, through which the summer blue eyes peered out, with fat, soft flesh as white as drifted snow, and laughing lips, when no one made her cross.

Sometimes her grandfather met her with her dog on the roadway, at times when he was showing some strangers about.

It was a thoroughbred collie, and in spite of his dislike to the family, he was proud of it.

'My daughter's dog,' he would remark, if he noticed it, ignoring the child, who would look at him with a steely glitter in the blue eyes, as she heard and felt the slight, for this grandfather could make children feel when he intended to be either cold or kind.

'And the lovely child, who *is* she?'

'Oh! that is my daughter's youngest,' in an off-hand and slighting way, that would send Bell with a scarlet face into her favourite villager's doorway.

She had tried by many guiles to win her grandfather before she quite gave him up. Sometimes when she saw him leading out his other grand-children, the children of his daughter-in-law, she would go up and put her hand into his as well; but as he had pushed her on one side on each of these occasions, she gave that up. One time, however, she thought she had hit upon a capital way to distinguish herself. He had some pails standing to catch rain-water in the yard, and one day when she had gone into this yard, in the first days of her Applewait experiences, and vainly tried to attract his notice, she fell upon the device, foreign to her usual tidy habits, of splashing the water about. She was rewarded, but not in the way she expected, as he looked round with a stern face, and seeing who it was, said harshly—

'Go away, you dirty girl.'

Bell drew herself up and walked away, and never troubled her grandfather any more. Nor did she appear even wounded when he openly paraded his attentions to her cousins after this, which her mother wondered at. Bell was wiser in her generation than her mother had been, for she weighed him and her grandmother in the balance of her little mind, and finding them both wanting and utterly beneath her infantine contempt, cast them out for ever from her thoughts and ignored them utterly. This she always did with those who were not friends. To her friends, however, she gave her most passionate affection.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE NEVER, NEVER LAND

DIRK DAVELOCK had finished his six months of intense labour, and, as he felt, with good reason successfully, if not with the fiery enthusiasm with which he began.

On the completion of the six months, he packed up his last batch of sketches and manuscript, and felt that he had conquered Fate, and that the man for whom he had striven had just cause to be proud of his exertions. Three hundred and seventy-two was the last number of his pictures which he had packed and sent off, with fifty pages of manuscript over and above his contract.

He had traversed, besides, the whole extent of New South Wales and Queensland, describing and sketching the northern ports as he had gone along: Maryborough, Rockhampton, Mackay, Bowen, Townsville, Cairns, Cooktown; the points of interest up north, and within the Great Barrier Reef, with the many capes and islands which stud those coral-creating latitudes.

When he could spare the time, he had gone inland as far as possible, listening to the settlers, and getting their stories and experiences. He had seen and drawn the mighty Falls of the Barron at Cairns, loftier than Niagara. He had seen the Tin Mines of Herbertston, the wonderful Golden Mountain at Rockhampton, the huge pinnacle called Peter Botte at Cape Desolation, the vast assemblage of boulders at Cape Melville, and the great Ant Cities at Albany.

At Maryborough he had almost been tempted to take advantage of an invitation which the Captain and Government agent of a black trader had given him, to visit the Solomon Islands, but resisted the temptation, partly because his time was so limited, and partly because he had seen something of

that peculiar traffic during his former colonial experience. Luckily for him that he did resist as the schooner was never more heard about.

Then he sailed through the Torres Straits, and round the British portion of New Guinea, sketching by day and writing by night as he travelled along, too much engrossed and busy to take the fever which prostrated some of the crew of the vessel in which he sailed, or to consider the dangers from which Providence alone protected him whilst among these man-eating savages.

It was at Thursday Island that he got his first letters since leaving Rockhampton. Letters from home, telling him all the trouble at Applewait, with orders from Mr. Moloch through the agent that he was to extend his time and see more of the country. So they must be satisfied with his efforts, although no word of praise came, neither were there any faults found. The orders were simply: 'Go on as you are doing, and take your own time to it after this.'

It was good enough without further commendations, for with these last words Dirk felt released from his former hard compact, another boon to be grateful for from his friend Mr. Moloch. 'It must be the way of Metaltown not to give any encouragement by words,' thought Dirk. 'I am far too profuse myself, and expect too much in return; that must be it.'

He now set about preparing for the most difficult, as well as the most dangerous portion of his undertaking, the journey through the vast Continent, this great Never, Never Land.

As yet he had not quite made up his mind which route to take of the many gone over by explorers; but one point he had determined upon, which was to go alone, with his rifle, cartridges, and sketching materials, and leave the rest to chance.

Chance determined the question. A coasting steamer was starting next day for Normanton, in the Gulf of Carpentaria, so he decided to go there in the first place.

He had plenty of leisure during the slow progress of the steamer to study his charts, listen to the stories of the old settlers who were returning home, as to the condition of the country, and meditate as to what he was to do when he landed, for they had to sail cautiously by day, and anchor each night by sundown.

He had become inured by this time to the excessive heat of this northern climate, and, after his New Guinea experience, did not fear malaria much. Being a dead shot with his rifle and revolver, he thought that he might manage to furnish himself with food, particularly as the settlers informed him that game was plentiful enough in these parts of the country as far down as Cloncurry, from which the telegraph wires ran to Bourke, on the New South Wales border.

He sat down to the map and studied it carefully; and decided that he would follow, as far as possible, the route taken by the ill-fated Burke and Wills in 1860.

By inquiring, he found out that, with luck, he would pass through the wet season about the half portion of his journey down it, catching him somewhere about the Barcoo; and, as the present season had been unusually moist, he need not dread so much the want of water. In the opinion of some of the old hands, the less he took with him in the way of luggage, the more chance he would have of succeeding in his undertaking.

'Take a dog, if you can get one, a good axe, something to light your fire with, and so be that you are not too particular as to grub, you'll do it if you can steer clear of the hostile blacks.'

This was the advice one sage old digger gave him as they left the steamer and took their way to the hotel.

The steamer stopped at Double Island on the Norman River, and they were rowed up the town, a flourishing little place and rapidly increasing. He put up at the Commercial Hotel, and after a night of mosquito fighting, set about preparing for his journey.

He made up his mind to take the ordinary mail-coach as far as Cloncurry, 260 miles south of Normanton, and from there make his way to Hergott Springs, giving himself a walk of about six hundred miles, after which he would take the train direct to Adelaide and Melbourne.

Six hundred miles on the map, which, perhaps, would mean seven hundred, making allowances for detours and stoppages *en route*, for which he allowed himself two months and a half. Reckoning altogether, for coaching and railway journey, he gave himself three months to do the tramp.

So, after getting what he required, over and above what he

had already provided himself with at Brisbane, he sat down and wrote to his Melbourne agent that he might expect to see him in three months and a half at the latest, sending off with the letter his last half month's work. Then, with a fond farewell to those at home, he took his seat on the coach and drove away, determined to trouble himself no further with the outer world until he once again touched civilisation and the iron line at Hergott Springs.

It was an interesting drive between Normanton and Cloncurry; long stretches of open plain where the wonderful ant-hills stood. Swampy ground where the alligators basked. Jungles where the pythons, tiger-snakes, and serpent-eating cobras lurked. Rich vegetation in some parts, particularly near the Flinders River; succeeded by open sandy stretches where the deaf adder lay with its deadly poison fangs.

At Cloncurry he tried to get a dog, but found that he would have to take the dog's master also, who offered his services to guide him across the country.

The dog was one of the nondescript mongrels who hang about natives' camps, and his master was a lithe young South Australian aboriginal, who had somehow drifted up north from Port Augusta, and wanted a mission so as to get home again. He could speak broken English, and praised both himself and his lean quadruped as wonderful treasures.

Dirk studied them both as they stood before him in the bright sunlight. They were not very comely to look upon, but both appeared sharp and trustworthy, albeit that they each had small and deep-set eyes.

'Yes, I'll take you, Billy.'

'All right, you follow, and me take you safe down there.'

Two hours afterwards and they had turned their backs upon the camp, Billy, the aboriginal, shouldering Dirk's knapsack along with a bundle of spears and a boomerang; with Dirk a few paces behind carrying his rifle and ammunition, while the starved-looking, white-and-yellow spotted mongrel trotted between them. Billy took the lead with a characteristic remark which proved his sincerity and wish to act honestly, if it did not inspire his temporary master with too great confidence.

'Black fellow walk in front of white fellow all the way, so that devil no able to whisper in him heart to kill white fellow when he only see him back.'

CHAPTER VIII

MR. MOLOCH IS, ON THE WHOLE, FAIRLY WELL SATISFIED WITH THE PROGRESS OF EVENTS

MR. MOLOCH sat in his private, electric-belled and plentifully telephone-tubed sanctum reading his despatches from abroad.

The past six months' work lay before him, that is, the last instalment, along with a pile of colonial and home newspapers, with notices marked off. The colonial packages came from Mr. Garland, and the home extracts from press friends of Dirk, who thought to do him a good turn with his employer by praising him up, and publicly noticing his colonial progress.

Mr. Garland also had sent the papers with all honesty of purpose. He was delighted that the work should be taken notice of, and that Dirk had won such golden opinions, so that he also worded his report with an amount of enthusiasm which, as Mr. Moloch read, brought a very ugly scowl into his pinched and fair-complexioned face, making his large outstanding ears grow scarlet as they visibly twitched backwards and forwards, while his rabbit-like front teeth gleamed behind his scraggy moustache.

He pitched Mr. Garland's eulogistic epistle impatiently to one side after reading over the first and second page, to break open the next one which was from Hodge Hinderlans, over which he pored diligently, while his features relaxed and the snarl of that rabbit-mouth became a broad and satisfactory grin.

'So he has gone overland, has he, and at the worst season? Let us see what the fool says about it.' This he muttered as

he broke open the third envelope, which was dated from Normanton, North Queensland, and read over the grateful outpouring of the deluded Dirk.

'Ah, I think this is about the last we shall hear from this gushing fool. Burke and Wills' route, no less. Well, I think we have got our money's worth out of him, and can afford to let the papers sing his requiem. I may as well put his work in hand with some one else's name on it; yes "Jenkinson" will do as well as any one else, and I owe him a good turn for his brother's sake.'

At this moment the office-boy entered with a card, which he handed to his superior.

'Show the gentleman in.'

The boy went out and re-entered again, ushering in Mr. Melgarf.

'How do you do, Mr. Melgarf?' said Mr. Moloch, shaking hands with him and pointing to a seat. 'You have called for news, I suppose, about our travellers?'

'Yes, Mr. Moloch, I trust that the young man is giving satisfaction to the firm of Grabbleson, as I feel partly responsible for introducing him, and would not like him to turn out a *complete* failure?'

'Ah, dear me, no, he is not a failure; he is doing fairly well, and on the whole I am pretty well satisfied with his efforts.'

'He is industrious, I hope? I was in fear in case he——'

'Ah, yes, fairly industrious,' returned Mr. Moloch, showing his teeth in a pleasant grin. 'Not quite so careful as I might like, perhaps, but——'

'Ah! I was afraid that he might not be careful,' observed Mr. Melgarf, with an ominous shake of his head.

'Still he does his best, I have no doubt, and we shall be able to utilise some of his work.'

'I have had a letter from him this morning saying that he was going overland, don't you think——?'

'Yes; I certainly do think it is a most unwise and useless step to take,' replied Mr. Moloch emphatically.

'Then he has gone entirely on his own responsibility, eh?'

'Entirely.'

'I am glad to hear you say so, Mr. Moloch. It is comforting to hear that a firm with such highly moral principles

as Messrs. Grabbleson's would never countenance such a rash step.'

'I can assure you that the young man will hear about it when he comes home.'

'If he comes home, Mr. Moloch.'

'Of course, Mr. Melgarf, and if he does not, he can only blame his own stupidity.'

'That is all. Ah, I had my fears of his ability from the first, but did not like to discourage him for the sake of his wife and family; however, I am glad at any rate that he has not quite failed. As a true friend of his, I am very glad.'

'I feel sure you are, and he is a fortunate young man to have such a well-wisher.'

The two *friends* of the absent Dirk Davelock shook hands warmly and parted.

CHAPTER IX

THROUGH THE DESERT

BILLY, the aboriginal, had not belied either himself or his mongrel and nameless dog, when he praised them both up, and Dirk found the united qualities out before he had been in their company two days.

He began as he meant to go on, and, to Billy's intense satisfaction, adapted himself to the native style of living; that is, he did not trouble himself about where his next meal was to come from, or of what his present meal consisted of.

For firing purposes he had his flint and steel, and the only extra which he carried besides his quinine, was a packet of salt. He had made up his mind to do without tobacco, tea, or bread, and live upon what he could pick up on the road, and it is wonderful upon how little a man can exist when he makes up his mind firmly to do without.

For instance, he had accustomed himself for the past two months to take no liquid except water, and that only once a day, like the Arabs, and in measured quantities. In fact, by putting himself upon short allowance when he had plenty at command, he did not find it any great privation when he was forced to go to sleep without his daily drink, on the days when no water-hole met their eyes.

Billy carried, along with his spears and boomerang, a large bow and some arrows, which Dirk had brought from New Guinea. The settlers at Cloncurry had laughed at their meagre and curious outfit, but the explorers did not mind that. They were satisfied with one another, and hopeful about the journey before them. So day after day they tramped on under that blazing sun, covering, some days, when the ground was good, thirty-five and forty miles between daybreak and dusk; bringing up generally each

night at some water-hole, where they found food enough in the wild-fowl which frequented these creeks.

The smaller game, such as pigeons, crows, or bustards, Billy and the dog were capable of managing with his spears, bow and arrow, or boomerang. The dog had a keen nose, and Billy an eagle glance, and an unerring hand, so that seldom a startled flock rose on the wing without some being brought to the ground, after which the cooking operations were very simple;—while the one lit a fire the other plastered over the bird with moist clay, which they plunged into the red ashes and baked until it was hard, after which they broke open their baked mould to find their supper beautifully cooked, tender and clean, with the feathers all plucked as completely as the best poulterer could have plucked them.

Sometimes they stalked a herd of kangaroos or emus, then the rifle of Dirk came into use, only, he was very careful over his ammunition, never knowing how soon he might require it. Besides, once a week was often enough for kangaroo feed, as Billy was a very heavy feeder when he could get it. And when the feast was kangaroo, he never left off eating while there was any of the flesh remaining, after which he was no good either for marching or fighting for a couple of days.

Sometimes, instead of fowl, they had to content themselves with such game as snakes, lizards, or iguanas, which, however, when cooked, tasted quite as well. Indeed, a roasted lizard is as delicious as a very tender chicken, while there is no difference between an eel, and the most venomous snake, when its head is cut off quickly.

Fresh meat in that latitude did not keep long, so that they could only kill what they required for the meal.

Australia is such a vast country that it seems very sparely provided with wild game, but such is not the case. By the side of creeks, even in the heart of the Continent, there are crowds of bird life. When all else failed, they had always the rats and insects to tackle. Billy taught him how to appreciate the black fellows' delicacies, ants and white grubs. And after a gulp or two of disgust, such as one is apt to make over his first oyster, Dirk grew almost as fond of them as Billy was. At first he shut his eyes and tried to imagine that it was some Italian macaroni compound he was swallowing, but very soon he grew to appreciate them for themselves,

and, as Peter did at Joppa, learned the great lesson in this vast solitude, that nothing is unclean which God hath cleansed.

For bread and relish he chewed the plants which Billy pointed out, and as he walked along through the forests, he plucked the green leaves, and found them more refreshing than anything else. Altogether, after the first week, he began to feel as if he could live anywhere, and upon anything.

Sometimes they saw traces of blacks, which Billy and the dog always gave a very wide berth to; and once or twice, but for the dog's timely warning, they might have been surprised in their sleep and murdered. However, days and nights were passing rapidly, and the miles were growing into single hundreds between them and Cloncurry, as they neared the tropic of Capricorn.

More than once they had narrow escapes from alligators in some of the still-flowing rivers over which they had to cross, savage beasts that made clutches at them even in the bark raft which Billy on these occasions improvised.

Was this the country through which Burke and Wills had passed and suffered so horribly?—open plains with good pasturage; rivers there were no lack of, and even when the dry season was at its worst, the beds were covered, and the grass looked green and plentiful; while along the banks of some of them drooped the beautiful weeping tea-tree, trailing into the streams like willows.

True, this had been an uncommonly moist season, which perhaps accounted for everything looking so flourishing. At times they passed over ground undulating, grass-covered, and with trees dotting over it for two or three days' journey, like any well-preserved estate in England, only of much greater extent. Bunya-bunya trees, dundathe, cypress, and she-pines, rearing themselves up erect and stately. They passed under silky-oaks, iron-barks, and stingey-barks, with the beautiful spotted and blue gum-trees. Mile upon mile they travelled through these lovely domains of solitude, only broken by the half-choked gurgle of the Queensland laughing jackass as he swooped down upon his natural enemy the snake. The northern jackass cannot laugh outright like his southern kind, but always makes an abortive attempt at a ghastly kind of cachinnation.

There was a certain monotony about these natural

preserves which did not admit of much sketching. Yet they were inexpressibly charming and soothing to the eye, with all their subtle variety of colouring and twistings of the branches, which often made Dirk fall into a pleasant reverie as he trudged along behind his guides. At these times he would not look carefully to his feet until recalled to the present by the voice of Billy shouting out :—

'Look out, you fellow Davelock, him deaf adder you going to tramp on!'

Then he would see with a shudder that he had nearly trodden upon one of these deadly deaf reptiles, who are so quick to wake up and bite, although they cannot hear the approach of any one.

Sometimes they came upon a deep gully, where the scrub was so dense that they had to cut their way through it ; where palm-trees, zamias, wild plums, and cherries, with other semi-tropical plants, grew in profusion down to the water edge. Here they had to look out for the larger snakes, and the pythons, as well as the tiger-snakes, and, if the water was plentiful, for alligators in the deep shadows. In spite of the beauties of those sheltered groves, Dirk was always glad to get once more into open ground.

Then they would ascend ridges of glaring sandstone or granite, where no shelter was to be found and no trace of water. Glistening sides, with metallic streaks and veins in them, which might be gold ; while before them, as they reached the summit, spread, far as the eye could range, vast fields lying covered with closely-placed mounds, like cut and stacked sheaves of ripened corn, lying golden in the midday ray.

These mounds, as they drew nearer to them, became like the huts of some extinct race, with narrow streets intersecting them. A mighty city of deserted huts, cone-shaped, and standing up three or four feet from the ground ; termite erections, which seemed to be abandoned by their builders, for when they broke into some of them no sign of life showed up.

A melancholy walk through those silent and deserted streets, which depressed Dirk horribly. Even Billy tried to escape from them as quickly as possible, giving as his reason, that it was a bad place to be caught in by the black fellows. Therefore he would not rest here, but tramped on day and

night until they were left behind: a melancholy sight by day, but weird-like by moonlight, with the deep shadows falling from them, and their upper sides shining ghostly and like countless tombstones.

What lovely nights some of these moonlights were, when they had camped under their bark and gum-shard-huts, which Billy raised so quickly, with the aromatic gum-leaves for their beds! Dirk was used by this time to the myriads of mosquitoes which hovered about them, his hands and face being tanned perfectly brown. Nights when the pretty wild cats came out of their holes and played around the rocks, while the shy opossums, bandicoots, and wombats hopped about the moon-bleached ground, all unconscious of the presence of their natural enemies, men. The dingoes prowled in the plains, and the flying foxes and squirrels flitted from branch to branch; while the bush-spiders spun their silver threads across the low scrub, as over it all fell the silent dewdrops glittering like frost-work.

So they went on for nearly six weeks, without serious hardship or mishap; although often enduring long fasts and heavy marches.

They did not attempt to go straight; sometimes they would have a dozen or twenty miles to take to avoid a swamp, or before they could get across a river, or through a close-set, impenetrable scrub. Yet the compass ever kept them right, and they expected before many more days to strike either the Thompson or Diamentina Rivers. They were then, they reckoned, in the lower part of North Gregory.

This portion of the country was becoming very arid and difficult to pass over. Dry tracks of cracked clay which opened in parts in great jagged fissures, over which they could not leap, so that they had to zig-zag about for days at a time, until the chasm became narrow enough to cross.

The weather also had begun to change. Instead of the blue fleecy sky which had hitherto been their daily vault; dark and threatening clouds came bulging up and rolling about the space above them; while fierce gusts, like the 'brick-fielders' of Victoria, rushed past them, filling the air with fine and irritating sand, that made travelling almost an impossibility. Still they managed to struggle on, although, at this portion of their journey, some days they could not

make more than three or four miles, and even that was a weariness which wellnigh exhausted them.

Billy looked at those ominous rain-clouds with an anxious eye, saying, 'Plenty big rain come by and by.'

They were toiling over almost level plains at this time without seemingly a termination, intersected here and there with deep chasms and creeks almost all dried up. Yet now and again they reached some hole where the water was not quite dried up, although very muddy and brackish. Still they were fairly well as to health, and managed to find food of some sort.

'Plenty big rain must no come to us here, or we will be drowned; we must get up high first.'

'Are there any hills near here?' inquired Dirk, alarmed at these words.

'Over there,' replied the black laconically, pointing across the plain.

'Far?'

'Two days more.'

After this it became a stern march against time. They did wonders in the way of crossing gaps and gulleys, trusting entirely to chance in their night travelling, and getting many a fall on the way; dangers, however, which more than once the faithful dog saved them from, as by following him they escaped many a gap which might have broken their necks.

The weather before and during these hot wind tempests was most oppressive, while all the day long they were mocked at with mirages. On every side of them there seemed to be sheets of water with reflections of trees and high banks.

At last, on the afternoon of the second day, they could see the distant ranges lying softly on the horizon. At this welcome sight they felt their courage revive, and put on a fresh spurt to get to them; battling with bent heads against the sand-laden hot gale which was blowing from the south-west full upon their faces.

The ground which they were toiling over was composed of baked and crumbling clay, which, with the first shower, would become a perfect quagmire, so that they did not dare to pause, although almost fagged out.

On, on through that dull, hot afternoon and murky starless night, their eyeballs bloodshot and smarting. They had not stopped to eat for the past two days.

Next morning the day dawned dimly and continued to get darker as it advanced, while the clouds above them were rolling over one another like layers and eddies of brown mud. Dirk had never seen such a sky for dirtiness and turmoil. The sun would not come out, and everything looked sombre, for now the gale had entirely ceased below, leaving a deathly silence on the earth, with that swiftly-tossing panorama of cloud-world above, as if the gale was raging amongst them and mixing them with dingy toned, desert clay-powder.

Dirk dare not look up as he rushes onwards towards those stony ranges now starting up gloomy and sterile-looking in the near distance.

Before him some beetling cliffs loom up with fissured crevices as if an earthquake had rent them asunder, leaving black cavern-like apertures which seem to promise a shelter, if they can only reach them in time; while overhead, those clay-tinted, jumbled clouds seem to be rushing down to fall upon the ground.

There is not an instant to lose, and they both spring forward with bounding steps, when suddenly the dog and Billy stop dead and pause irresolute.

'What are you waiting for, Billy? Come along, quick,' shouts Dirk, without resting, as he looks back.

'Black fellow, you see!' bellows Billy, pointing to the rocks ahead, while Dirk feels a sharp pain in his left leg, which somewhat arrests his progress and makes him turn his head quickly, to see the cave and rocks lined with dark figures of armed natives.

Dirk has no time to think; the danger above is as great as the danger in front, for all about them are falling large lumps of spiked ice, which look even more deadly than the shower of spears which is being sent from the rocks. Quickly he drops upon his wounded knee and fires off his loaded rifle with a loud report which echoes like thunder amongst the rocks. Then he rushes forward with rifle at the club, charging through those who bar his entrance to the cave.

Billy follows, with the dog at his heels, in gallant style after that instant of pause, while the natives, startled at the unaccustomed explosion, leap to one side and let them enter.

It is hardly a cave which they are in, just a fissure in the rock, with an overhanging ledge above, enough to protect them from that murderous hailstorm which now tumbles down, like stones thrown from a castle turret upon besiegers, only so closely together that there seems to be no chance of escape for the unfortunate blacks who are exposed to its terrific force.

Solid lumps of jagged and spiked ice, some of them larger than two hands placed together, battering down one on the top of the other like a perfect wall, making the day into night, with a sound like smashing crystal as they break against each other and sink, some of them deeply, into that hard clay soil.

Dirk, in the excitement of the moment, as he watches with awestruck soul that awful heavenly avalanche, does not feel the pain of the spear which is still sticking in his thigh, and which he has dragged along with him; while Billy, in a paroxysm of terror, lies with his face pressed against the earth. He can only look out on that down-pouring mass and watch it piling on the ground in front, crashing each other in glittering bits, with a deafening and unceasing tinkling like myriads of jangling bells.

For half an hour this goes on, and then there are some signs of it clearing.

Dirk is recalled to his own position by Billy, who has recovered his presence of mind, and proves it by making a sudden jerk at the unnoticed spear. Then Dirk feels the same that one is apt to feel when a tooth is drawn out, and as if his heart was also being torn out by the roots, after which a balm ineffable creeps over him, while he sinks down in a deep faint, leaving to Billy the duty of protecting their citadel.

Note on Tropic Hailstorms.—Lest any English reader who has not been abroad may fancy that this description is exaggerated, the author begs to state that he experienced a similar hailstorm in Queensland once, when the after effects were as if there had been a regular bombardment; iron and weather-board houses perforated as if with cannon-balls, cattle struck down and killed in the fields, limbs struck from trees, and more valuable property destroyed in that half-hour than could be imagined or credited, unless by those who had witnessed the general havoc.

CHAPTER X

'HER BOSOM'S LORD SAT LIGHTLY ON ITS THRONE'

IT was once more balmy spring weather at Applewait, and the young lambs were to be seen on the hillsides along with their mothers, causing great delight to little Bell, who never tired telling her dog Tweed all about them.

'Sheepie ma'a cried "Ba, ba"; doggie cried "Bow wow."'

And Tweed responded by wagging his tail, and looking up with a make-believe eye as if he didn't know it before, and was wondering at the news.

Katie, the long-time invalid was getting better and able at last to walk about with her brothers and sisters, although not yet strong enough to go to school. But she was very thin and white-faced, and could not run as the others were doing, so she chose to act as many others in the world do, pretend that running was babyish, and that she despised such frivolity, as Byron did dancing.

But she was very affectionate and clinging to her mother; she walked by her side constantly, and spoke to her about ordinary matters just as if she was a little woman.

To-day they were all light-hearted and merry, the elder children because it was a Saturday, therefore a holiday, Bell because she had her doggie and big dark-eyed brother with her, Katie because she was going for a walk with her darling mamma, and the mother because, with the sun, hope seemed to be shining, and her sick one was getting strong once more.

For some weeks before this she had been very low-spirited because of a dream she had had, in which she thought she had lost one of her teeth. It was the tooth she was proudest of, as it was her prettiest and soundest one, and the dream

had been interpreted by Tibby as meaning the death of some near relation. She had also heard no word from Australia for the past two months, and although she could expect none, the last letter telling how that Dirk would be out of range of post-offices for three or four months, still she worried about it, although in her ignorance not at all anticipating any other danger except, perhaps, sickness to her husband in that far-off country. He had told her in his former letters that Australia was just like England, only more genial in its climate, and she believed him.

Still she had nasty dreams about him which depressed her. Sometimes it was as if he were floating on a raft over a boundless ocean, wrecked and alone, which she felt to be nonsense when she woke, as he would be sure to write before he started on any voyage, and the last letter had told her that he was safe ashore and meant to spend the next three months seeing the country round about Queensland. She had not read about these Australian explorers and their sufferings, and thought that Dirk's present adventure was merely a walking tour such as one might take through the outlying parts of England or Cornwall; a long sketching tour, as he had told her.

This morning she had arisen wonderfully light-hearted, with that peculiar feeling upon her which Romeo felt when he said, 'My bosom's lord sits lightly on its throne.' She felt as if good news would be coming shortly from him she loved so dearly and waited for so faithfully.

New Guinea had been the main danger to her mind, and that was past safely. The early post had brought her a newspaper in which her husband's exploits had been recounted with flattering comments, with a sensational article which made him out a hero; therefore she had dressed herself and her children for the long walk, with laughing pride and joy in her heart, which made her face look as young and charming as that of her blooming, rosy-cheeked eldest daughter.

To-day she was going to the station to meet her husband's friend, Mr. Melgarf, who had written to say that he would be passing on his way to Metaltown, and would like to see her and the children.

She did not like the old man, but felt to-day in her own

happy freedom from care as if she had misjudged him, and that he must be a real friend and well-wisher, else he would never have bothered asking her to meet him.

Some of the neighbours, who, as village people know everything, knew where she was going, said laughingly to her, 'You look as bright, Mrs. Davelock, as if you were going to see your sweetheart!' and she replied as merrily 'that she was going to speak about him at any rate, which was the next best thing to seeing him,' and so went on through the budding trees with her little flock, as happy as the mothers were upon the distant hillsides.

She laughed, also, at a comic conceit which struck her as she noticed a large solitary crow who *would* soar round about her party that morning, even while she felt a little self-reproach that such an unworthy idea should occur to her; but there was something about the motions of that black crow which reminded her of the way in which Mr. Melgarf used to come and go, on his weekly visits, in those miserable, yet dear days of uncertainty.

'No more uncertainty now,' she murmured, with a sigh of happiness; 'so fly away, you ugly black crow, and find your mate.'

But the bird of evil omen would not fly away, but kept near to them most of the road to the station, as if he had been an outcast from his tribe, or was past all ideas of mating.

The children were all nicely dressed, and like pictures as they danced along. Jocelyn, the eldest, clad in ruby velvet and bright buttons, looking like a Spanish hidalgo, with his tawny skin and rich dark eyes. He was fond of his little sister Bell, as she was proud of his protection, so she would toddle alongside of him, holding his hand, instead of riding in her perambulator, like a little blue butterfly in her pretty pale blue plush dress, and tangled curls tossing about her fair face. No need of the bloom of Ninon here, with the lilies and the roses blending around those sprigs of forget-me-not eyes.

Adrian, the younger brother, walked with his mother-sister. He was like a little student, with large, solemn, thoughtful brown eyes and sedate features. He did not often express himself in words, but when he did, the remark was quaint

and original. He was, like his brother, dressed in ruby velvet, but, somehow, the clothes did not seem to sit so well upon him—nothing ever did.

Bertha was the picture of grace and loveliness, tall for her age and slender, with a mass of tawny golden hair, complexion dazzlingly clear, and soft, gentle, dove-like eyes. As she looked, so she was, the spirit of mildness and patience, and the right hand of her mother. Her dress was an æsthetic one of pale sea-green, with puckers about the arms, and edges of sea-foam—a warm dress, although light-looking.

Katie was also warmly wrapped up in a white fur jacket with scarlet lining, with a cosy hood over her head. She had round her neck a string of pale blue beads which she was very proud of, for she had got them a few days before, a present from her mother.

When she had first risen from bed she had put them on, and had gone to show them to her grandfather, who remarked with his usual consideration for the feelings of his daughter's children:—

'Well, Katie, have you got up at last?'

'Yes, grandfather.'

'And what sort of cheap jimcracks have you got there on your neck?' pointing to the beads.

'They are not jimcracks, they are a present from my mamma,' answered Katie severely, always jealous of her mother's dignity.

'I thought so. She is always decking you up in some outlandish way, like as if you were a set of savages.'

Two days after this, the discomfiture of the silly old man came with Katie's hour of revenge, which she did not allow to pass. Her cousin, his favourite granddaughter, came to see him, wearing on her neck a similar string of blue beads.

'See, Katie,' observed he, after caressing his favourite, while the little invalid stood by, neglected and pale-faced, but keenly observant, 'there is a proper kind of necklace. Why doesn't your mother get you something pretty like this to wear?'

'They are the same kind of beads as I had, grandfather, which you called cheap jimcracks, only mine were a dearer

set,' observed Katie coldly, but quietly, even while her lips quivered.

The old man was caught, and could only snigger out 'He! he! he!' He had forgotten what the beads were like which he had condemned so unreasonably, but Katie hadn't. Children have better memories than old men when they begin to grow childish and spiteful.

'How I hate that grandfather,' she burst out when she got home, burying her white face in her mother's knee.

'Never mind him, darling, he is getting old and cross,' said her mother, fondling the large intellectual head.

'I don't care *that* for him, and I will wear your beads,' replied Katie fondly, and so she did, as a Christian might have worn the symbol of his faith in the days of Nero.

They got to the station in good time to see the train come in, and shake hands with the well-wisher, who had not seen them for nearly a twelvemonth.

Mrs. Davelock saw him first as he got out of the carriage, and hurried forward to meet him with a hearty welcome. But as she caught sight of his hard grey face with the chilly eyes, which looked inquiringly along the platform, for he had not as yet caught sight of her, a cold shiver of repulsion passed over her, and the glad light died out of her glance. He recognised her at the moment when the shiver was passing over her, so that she blushed crimson at the thought of what he might have read upon her face.

'How are you all?' he observed, taking her outstretched hand and shaking it vigorously.

'Very well, thank you, Mr. Melgarf.'

'You have the children with you, I see; good! Ah, so this is the invalid, is it?—she looks as if she had been ill; and the baby grown quite a big girl; will she give me a kiss?'

'Bell, kiss the gentleman,' said Mrs. Davelock.

But Bell had ideas of her own on that point, for she stood looking very solemnly at Mr. Melgarf, retreating as he advanced towards her, and so ever keeping the same distance between them.

'Come and give the gentleman a kiss, Bell,' repeated her mother.

'No, mamma, Bell no' tiss that gentleman.'

'Ah, she doesn't like kisses, perhaps, but she will when she grows older,' said the aged one awkwardly, and not insisting any further. 'See, I have brought a picture-book for Katie.'

Kate took the book with a smiling face.

'I might have something also for Bell if she would give me a kiss as payment,' he said, searching his pockets; but Bell did not feel tempted, still staring at him with large open eyes, saying nothing.

'Very well; next time I see you perhaps you will be kinder; and now, good-bye, Mrs. Davelock. Any news from Australia?'

'None yet, Mr. Melgarf.'

'*Indeed!* I hope all may be well over there.'

'There could be nothing wrong surely, Mr. Melgarf?' inquired the fond wife, suddenly feeling a pang of newly awakened alarm.

'I trust not; but good-bye. See, my train is moving.'

'Good-bye.' A hurried hand-clasp and Mr. Melgarf had bolted out of sight with those comforting last words, which left her white-faced looking after him, all the happiness vanished from her heart.

'Come, children, let's get home to tea,' she said, at last, with a long-drawn sigh; taking hold of little Bell by the hand, and drawing her away from the platform, for she was still standing gazing at the swiftly vanishing train as if fascinated by it.

They all went down by the main street of the village where the station was, and where there were better and larger shops than at Applewait, to buy something for tea, and a little treat for grandfather, for Mrs. Davelock never forgot him, however much he might ignore her in his senile folly and subservience to the wealth of his daughters-in-law.

'A good beef-steak is what grandfather would like best,' remarked Katie, as they stood at the butcher's shop; so in they went and got one of the best that could be got; and then they passed on to the toy-shop window, and had a long look at its tempting display.

'Bell would like that doey,' observed the little one, who had kept strangely silent during the walk from the station, as she pointed to a large doll nearly as big as herself.

'Not to-day,' said her mother, who had to be economical as she was near the end of her quarter, and getting short of money. So they turned to the confectioner's shop to get some buns for their tea, as this was an extra day in their lives.

After this, they set out on their return journey, the children all happy and chattering, and the mother trying to banish from her mind the foreboding cloud which the last dismal words of Mr. Melgarf had laid upon it.

Half-way out Katie opened her picture-book by random, and the first picture disclosed did not tend to raise her mother's spirit much, for it was the representation of a graveyard.

'Shut it up, Katie, till you get home,' said her mother, impatiently, looking upon the large crow which now once more caught them up as if it had waited for them, and feeling more than ever as she looked at it, how strong a similarity there was between it and Mr. Melgarf. This time she did not laugh at the strange conceit, but felt dull and depressed over it; perhaps the want of the sunshine, for the sky was now overcast, had something to do with this sensation.

When at last she reached home she was annoyed to find that the kettle had capsized while she was absent and put out the fire, filling the whole kitchen, which she had left so clean and bright that morning, with ashes. It is a depressing sight for a tidy housewife to come in tired and find her fire black out and her kettle upside down.

However, she controlled her temper, and while the children were taking off their holiday dresses, she set about repairing the damages, and soon had the fire once more blazing and bright and the kettle again filled.

Just at that moment she heard the baker with his cart at the house-end, and with a word of caution to Adrian to look after his sister Bell, who had now got herself disrobed of her finery, she ran down to get her supply of bread.

All villagers are troubled with curiosity, and some even more so than others; the most curious as well as the most malicious, was an old maid who haunted her house at all times and who would not be turned away until her own inclination suited her to go. As ill-luck would have it, this

old vixen was at the baker's cart at the same time Mrs. Davelock reached it, and pestered her with questions as to where she had been, who Mr. Melgarf was, and what he had said. In reality she had seen her carry in the buns, and, having a toothsome taste, wished to be invited to tea, which Mrs. Davelock, knowing the character of her questions, did not feel disposed to extend, particularly at that moment, with her thoughts overshadowed with the forebodings about her absent husband.

At last she got rid of this intolerable nuisance in petticoats and could turn into her own door. Surely the kettle would be nearly boiling by this time. The children were all seemingly quiet; Katie and Bertha looking over Mr. Melgarf's present at the table. Jocelyn had as usual run out to play, while Adrian and Bell were on the floor playing quietly together.

At what?

Adrian had some half-burnt matches which he had collected and was arranging into the ground-plan of a house.

Bell was sitting with her back to her mother very busy upon something. 'Bell take her medicine.' Those were the words the mother heard as she came in, and the next moment the baby Bell gave a sudden scream and threw up her little arms. With a rush the distracted mother had her in her arms, while the old maid looked through the doorway with an evil grin upon her sin-lined features. It was a teaspoon which the child had in one chubby hand, while the other clutched a small phial of colourless liquid, with Carbolic Acid written upon the label, which the mother had used as a disinfectant and kept always carefully out of reach on a high shelf.

Had she swallowed any? God only knew. The mother grew blind with the agony which possessed her, remembering only that she had given the castor-oil bottle up to the grandfather, while the lovely Bell lay back in her arms without a movement. She did not know what she was doing, but instinct drove her to her parents' house, shrieking madly as she flew.

The grandfather was sitting at his tea as she swept in like a tornado, and as he gathered from her incoherent words that the baby was poisoned, he raised his eyebrows sarcasti-

cally with the remark, 'I expected something of the kind long ago.'

The mad mother did not hear those merciless words, for Heaven had graciously made all things oblivious to her except the true mother instinct to pour oil down her infant's burnt throat, which she was now doing, while the village nurse hurried in to help her, one of the villagers meanwhile running for the doctor.

Tibby turned savagely upon this unnatural grandparent with the words, 'For shame, old man, for shame.'

Then the grandfather, feeling uncomfortable and much annoyed at this invasion, for all the anxious village wives had followed the mother, with pallid faces, took up his hat and pipe and shuffled out for a walk, where he could enjoy his pipe by the riverside. And yet this old man, who could be so merciless, sarcastic, and unjust to his own daughter and her children, was one of the mildest, most inoffensive, and magnanimous of men *towards strangers*.

CHAPTER XI

AFTER THE STORM

BILLY, like all Australian aboriginals, was skilled in the dressing of spear wounds; and fortunately for Dirk, he had been wounded by Queensland instead of New Guinea natives, as the former do not poison their weapons like the latter.

Tearing up his master's shirt, now a mass of tatters at the best, he quickly made a bandage and stanched the flow of blood, after which, the terrific hailstorm being quickly over, he cautiously crawled out of the cave on a tour of investigation, accompanied by his faithful companion the dog.

Dirk had ofttimes wondered as he saw this nameless quadruped putting away pounds of juicy meat at a meal how, with that lanky body, he could do it without showing something for it. But there he was, with the ribs sticking almost through his mangy-looking coat. He was the most voracious, yet most pitiful and starved-like, mongrel any one could have met, and like to have disowned, and yet the most reliable upon an emergency. In fact, Dirk, during these six weeks' companionship, had considerably softened in his preconceived notions of pure breed and noble birth, for this ugly blending of all kinds displayed the sagacity of the pointer, with the tenacity of the true-born bull; he was a perfect marvel in the methods of dog instincts.

Billy crept out very cautiously, with a couple of spears in one hand, and his boomerang in the other. He was frightened or the gun, therefore he left it behind him, while the dog kept closely beside him, giving no signals of danger, so that Billy felt pretty confident.

One of the peculiar virtues of this dog was, that he never either growled or barked, instead of which, when he scented

game or danger, he would stand still, while his mangy bristles rose up on end as he showed his teeth. If he wished to warn his master when asleep, he spurred him awake with his fore-paws, or buried his sharp nose in his breast.

On the present occasion the hairs were all in their normal condition, so that there seemed to be no immediate danger; still, Billy crept out with great caution, looking about him at every step of the way.

What a scene greeted his eyes as he emerged from the cavity; it looked as if winter had suddenly descended upon this broad, Australian, sun-baked plain—jagged hummocks of ice everywhere, filling up the ruts and fissures, and glittering like fields of diamonds under the rays of the midday sun. The sky had cleared up overhead, and only away towards the north could he see the dark, heavy clouds racing with their deathly load.

Where were their late enemies? He looked anxiously up and down and wherever a foothold was to be seen about the rocks. Natives are horribly afraid of the supernatural, and this startling visitation would appear supernatural, particularly coming, as it did, with this white-faced, fire-making stranger, so perhaps those who had escaped from the hailstones may have fled over the ranges; still some must have fallen victims.

There reigned the deep silence of death all about him. On the ground outside the cave he saw about half a dozen sparkling mounds like crystal-covered graves, and came to the conclusion that these covered the bodies that had been struck down, as nothing mortal could have outlived that storm.

The sun was once more shining out fiercely, and very soon these spiked balls would be all dissolved and converted into water. Billy, now satisfied that the enemy had retreated, that is, if they had not all been killed, gathered up as many of these ice-balls as he could carry, and returned with them to his wounded and unconscious master.

He stacked up as many of them as he could carry in one portion of the cave, besides placing a number on the ledge outside, where, as the sun melted them, they would trickle down a tiny rivulet into the water-bottle. Then, while he waited on the melting of the icicles outside, he took one or

two, and laid them against the bandaged wound, watching the while for the return to consciousness of Dirk, over whose grimy face he passed his wet hands.

It was not very long before Dirk opened his eyes with a heavy sigh, gasping out, 'Water!'

The black fellow passed one of the half-melted ice-lumps across his lips, moistening them, and at the same time letting a few drops fall into his mouth. The chilly contact effectually roused Dirk, and he was very soon sitting up. 'Where am I? What was it all about? Ah!'

He had made a sudden movement as if to spring upon his feet, when the pain of his wound brought the late events vividly to his recollection. 'Ah! I remember; the blacks have wounded me. How have you kept them back, Billy?'

'They no come again after the devil storm.'

'Ah! I see; by Jove, that was a hailstorm and no mistake; it must have killed the beggars right out.'

'Some, lie outside, white fellow, when lumps go away me go out and look for the others.'

The clouds had now cleared away, and the afternoon sun was blazing down, reducing the ice into streams of water, which poured over the rocks from the flats above in many a cascade.

Dirk, with the aid of Billy, dragged himself outside, and luxuriated in this unaccustomed cold bath, catching the flood as it fell upon his hands, and making up for his long want of water, after which Billy drew him inside and laid him on his back.

'White fellow, Davelock, wait there for Billy to come again, but no move.'

Dirk did not resist this command, for he felt faint with the loss of blood, while the wounded leg was growing very painful and stiff.

'Billy soon bring something to cure bad leg; you bet, he am bad.'

Dirk felt that Billy was right; the leg felt badly, for the spear had gone in deeply; in fact, had only been prevented from going right through by the thigh bone, so that he was very glad to have a chance of lying still and resting his body, exhausted as he was with the long and continued tramp.

'Just put me where I can look out, Billy, and my rifle

handy in case of a surprise, and then you can go—only find something to eat if you can at all.'

'Billy get him something, you bet.'

After he had been placed in as easy a position as the cave would allow, with his back against the rocks, Billy crept out as before, his dog going with him.

The ice was now nearly dissolved; and as the black left his shelter, he saw what had looked before like mounds were now the bodies of six or seven naked blacks lying as they had been struck down, punctured all over with horrible and gaping wounds, as if riddled with great bullets; in fact, so fearfully disfigured that they had almost lost all semblance to humanity.

He found his way up the sides of the range without any difficulty, it being mostly composed of red sand and boulders, although here and there grew stunted brushwood in detached clumps and spiky grass.

As he advanced up the hill, he saw traces on every side of the sad havoc which that appalling storm had made—branches torn down, earth upturned. It looked almost as if the plough had passed over the mountain and plain, making it ready for a fresh crop.

He came upon four more bodies lying upon ledges; they had been overtaken on their way up, and caught in the rolling down.

Billy could speak English very well, but he had not become English in his habits. The old savage customs and superstitious instincts were strong within him; and now being sure that no master's glance could detect him, he gave way to the habits of his people without any compunction.

With one deft slash of his knife he cut open one of the dead men; and plunging in his hand, with a horrid look of triumph in his little eyes, he tore out the kidneys, not yet cold. Casting aside his tattered trousers, the only article of civilisation which he boasted, he very coolly began to anoint himself all over with the fat of the human kidneys. It was a horrid custom, but greatly believed in by all aboriginals as a preventative against the evils of sorcery, the black fellows' dread; for with them the fat of an enemy is a sovereign specific not to be lightly passed over.

After this ablution was over he carelessly threw the kidneys to his famished dog, who bolted them down greedily, and

then the two continued their climb. Soon he reached the top, to find a comparatively level plateau very thinly covered with coarse grass, and beyond that a boundless stretch of plain similar to that which they had left, only seemingly more fertile in its character.

Several dark specks in the far-off distance attracted the eye of Billy for a moment. These were the rapidly-flying remnant of the tribe who had attacked them. They had evidently been too greatly horrified and cowed at the visitation which had come upon them so suddenly either to think upon revenge, or of staying to carry off their dead; and were now intent only upon placing as great a space as possible between themselves and this evil wizard, who could call heaven's cannon-balls to help him at a moment's notice. From that particular lot Billy felt that they were safe, and chuckled hoarsely to himself as he thought it over, feeling all right himself with the demon for his friend and master.

The natives of central Australia have religious rites and a faith, although not generally credited with anything so far advanced. They believe in, and venerate, the spirit of evil, and have many mystic ceremonies and secrets which they guard most jealously from outsiders, covering themselves and their secrets with a careful mask of stupidity. A black fellow is the most mindless and ignorant of all earth races *when he does not wish to understand.*

Billy saw also what delighted him even more than the retreating forms of his enemies; a large flock of kangaroos had been making for the shelter of the rocks at the time of the hailstorm, and had been caught and struck down as the blacks had been. They were lying about in all directions ready to his hand. Very soon he was down amongst them, picking out the choicest, and hauling them up to the hilltop one after another.

He made several journeys down to the plains before he thought of returning to the cave, for he knew that he must take what he could before sundown, as with the night the starving dingoes would come in droves and devour the carcasses left, both kangaroos and natives, so that it was getting towards dusk before he returned to the anxiously waiting Dirk.

The wounded man had been lying in an agony of pain and

suspense, wondering if his followers, so long faithful, had abandoned him or been killed, when he became aware that some commotion was going on above amongst the rocks by showers of *débris* shooting down, followed by several dark forms, which bounded over the ledge and fell with heavy thuds in front of the cave. It was Billy's method of bringing home his game; with the last one he followed himself, a deep chuckle announcing his return and success.

'Billy no humbug, white fellow, you see; plenty supper here.'

The carcasses were dragged in and flung into a corner of the little cave. And then, that over, Billy started the fire with some bundles of brushwood which he had brought. The wood he burnt and the leaves he made a soft couch of, after picking out some of the freshest to bind about the wound. It was like paradise after the past day or two of suffering. Dirk forgot his caution, and imitated Billy in his eating. Steak after steak was cut from the kangaroos, pitched upon the embers, and devoured, *sans cérémonie*, the dog joining in with an endurance which conquered that of the men, until at last they could eat no more, but lay back replete and sleepy.

Then, while Billy set about getting branches and stones to barricade the entrance, Dirk pulled out his watch to roll it up preparatory to going to sleep. To his intense astonishment, he found it had stopped at 3.15 o'clock. He could hardly believe his eyes or ears, for it had been regularly wound up, and was one of the best make, which had not lost a second during the whole of his colonial experience. He shook it and wound it up and tried to make it go, without effect. Something had gone wrong with it all of a sudden, and so at last he put it back again into his belt pocket and shut his eyes, feeling more lonely and miserable than he could have thought the want of a watch could have made him. It would be Sunday night at home, in Applewait, what would they all be doing? Getting ready for bed and thinking fondly of him, as he was feeling miserable about them all.

'Good night, my darlings, good night,' he murmured, as he dosed off to a night of wretched dreams.

CHAPTER XII

'AND THEY PASSED THEIR CHILDREN THROUGH THE FIRE'

THE fiat had gone forth, and the little innocent was passing away. Once the mother had cried out in her heart despair: 'Ah, if her father had never left us, this might not have happened.'

'Nothing could have altered it,' said Tibby the nurse. 'What is dreed, is dreed.'

'Tush,' said the grandmother, 'it is better as it is; her father could never have stood her noise and throughgoing ways.'

'O God! O God! give me back my child!' moaned the mother.

'Hush, woman; don't ask back your child, let her go if it is the will of God,' cried the nurse fearfully. 'Once I saw a mother who did it; she drew the spirit back when it was leaving quietly, as only a mother can, and the child suffered awfully for it. Let her go, lassie, if you love her better than yourself.'

So the poor mother braced up her feelings and prayed for strength to bear her heavy burden, prayed that she might be less selfish in her sorrow.

The villager who had run for the doctor brought the wrong one, a rival to their own doctor who had attended Katie, a young man just beginning practice, and filled with all the modern inventions and ideas. He did his best according to his lights, and promptly set to work injecting morphia into the arm of the little patient.

Their own doctor heard about the accident and hurried also out as soon as he could. However, some one answered the door, and told him that the child was being attended to.

'But it ought to be my case,' said the doctor, trying to lay aside professional pride for the sake of the little Bell, who was a favourite of his.

Then her grandfather came out and told him that he was not wanted, and so the man who might have saved that little life was turned brutally away.

By and by the little one woke up to consciousness, and when she saw the new doctor she put out her little hands to push him away, saying, 'No-oo, I want Docto James.' She felt from the fuss made about her that she was ill, but she wanted her own friend.

Then Tibby the nurse ran in to ask Dr. James to come out again; and although one of the proudest sticklers for professional dignity, he returned with the village nurse and pushed his way in.

'Oh, doctor, doctor, why didn't *you* come before?' burst out the poor mother when she saw him.

'I did, but could not get in,' he replied, casting a vengeful look upon his rival and those who had refused him entrance. 'If the child had been in your own house, I would not have been kept out, but as it is—never mind, let me see the little one.'

Mrs. Davelock took him forward to where Bell was, feeling as if salvation was in his touch. She had been led to understand that he would not come.

This doctor examined the child carefully, and asked how she had been treated.

'Give her plenty of fresh milk,' he said brusquely.

'So she has been having,' replied the young practitioner stiffly.

'Did you put a poultice on her throat?'

'No.'

'Then you ought to have done it.'

'Will she get better, doctor?' cried out the mother hungrily.

'She may, if you do as I tell you,' answered he, with a slight smile. 'I wish you had kept her at home instead of going to your mother's house.'

'Can we not remove her?'

'Not at present. I'll do all that I can.'

Then the news spread about, and one of the rich sisters-in-

law came down, as she said, to help. She sat solemnly by the bedside in great state, while the grandmother bustled about to do honour to her wealthy guest.

She did not help nor sympathise, nor do the slightest good in any way by her officious presence; such visitors never do. But she managed to fluster the grandmother, who honoured her and her money so slavishly that even the august presence of Death could not impress her enough to let her lay aside, for the time being, her fawning gold-worship.

While the poor mother was moaning over her unconscious child, this favourite daughter-in-law touched her gently on the arm, saying in a silky voice—

'Don't you think, dear, that the milk for little Bell should be given unskimmed? You know the doctor said "new milk," and I see your mother is busy skimming it.'

The infatuated mother-in-law was even defrauding the dying child, so that this pampered favourite of hers and fortune should have the best for her tea.

'Is she doing that?' said the mother, looking up with bloodshot eyes. 'Surely she need not—there is milk enough and to spare at my own house if she sends down for it.'

What a miserable night for her as she sat in this house, where she ought to have felt at home, like an unwelcome stranger. What a night as she wept alone, with no friend to comfort until the doctor came again: with her baby babbling incoherently all her pretty baby sayings; with the sweet, sweet voice of music, each lisping word striking like redhot iron brands upon her memory, never, never again to be effaced while memory lasted.

Both doctors came again, and laid aside professional rancour for the time being, doing all that they could to save the little lady Bell.

They stayed beside her through the night, and saw that the little one got proper milk and attention in spite of the presence of that wealthy shadow. And only for the heat in her throat and the everlasting thirst, she did not appear to suffer at all, for she talked all night to her doggie and her bird, or the friends she had made about the village. When she did not sleep she went through all her stock of accomplishments, so that her mother might never be able to forget one of them.

And ever and anon, the old woman from whom she had bought her toys, Mrs. Gall, looked in, her face wet with tears, to hear the news; or the nurse slipped in and out again. Only the grandmother kept away, for she said she could not endure the sight of deathbeds; she sat with her favourite in the other room, wearying for it all to be over, so that she might get to bed.

No tear dimmed her aged eyes, yet she had wept copiously once over her daughter-in-law's boy when he had the measles.

When morning at last came, the young doctor went to the window and pulled up the blind. It was a lovely Sabbath morning with the early spring sun pouring its rays over the distant hillside, and the young lambs frisking about their mothers. He said half to himself—

'What a lovely morning, with the sun rising over the hills!'

At these words the little Bell looked up quickly from her mother's arm, all conscious and wise; and seeing the sheep with their lambs, replied, 'The sheepee-ma'a on the hills cried "Ba, ba," and the doggie says "Buff."'

'Does she see the sheep, do you think?' he asked, surprised at her word and the intelligence in her eyes.

''Ess, Bell sees the sheepee, and Bell sees the sun.'

'Then she has nineteen chances to one now for her life.'

What a wave of exultation swept over that poor mother's heart at these consoling words; she stooped over the little hot mouth, kissing it wildly.

'My darling, my darling, then you will not leave your mammy.'

''Ess, mammy, Bell go away—Bell die.'

'No, my darling pet, you are going to live now.'

'No, mammy, Bell die—but you go up with Bell.'

'Ah, my darling, if I could only go with you, or keep you here with me.'

But the little one persisted in her strange words, 'Me die, mammy, me dying—tiss Bell, mammy.'

The little maid knew best, for God had made her wiser than all the doctors at this hour—she was so near to heaven—so pure, with her head upon her poor mother's breast, and her little chubby hand clasped tenderly in the thin hand of that gentle messenger, Death.

All through that forenoon she lived, conscious and free from pain, listening to the ringing of the church bells, with her mother hoping against hope, as she clasped her closely to her heart, while her brothers and sisters looked in with awe-struck faces and streaming eyes, until the grandmother drove them downstairs *so as not to worry their mother.*

'Tweed,' the collie, however, would not be driven away; he snapped at those who tried to keep him back from his little mistress; and when he got his own way, he sat down and licked the little hand which hung down near him.

And the churchgoers went to church, and came home again, while Mrs. Gall, the old widow, sat in her own kitchen rocking her gaunt body to and fro, and moaning as she tried in vain to read her Bible, which she could not see for the tears which were running down her worn cheeks.

'Tiss me, mammy, tiss me.'

It was fifteen minutes past three o'clock when little Bell put up her hot, dry mouth for her mother's last kiss.

Then as the mother bent to get it, a great blaze of white light burst out of the forget-me-not eyes, blinding the hungry eyes which watched them, as the child-soul flew straight up to God.

The baby Bell *had left her mother*, desolate and broken-hearted.

CHAPTER XIII

AN AUSTRALIAN FLOOD

THE morning after this unaccustomed feast, Dirk woke up very feverish and ill. Clearly it would be many weeks before he could attempt to continue his journey; indeed, as the rains might be expected in a few days at most, they made up their minds to stay where they were and prepare against this.

Their present quarters would never do, as it was too near the plain, so they decided to move to the top of the hill and erect some kind of shelter, as they would likely be in for two or three weeks of wet weather when it came.

Billy spent the first day 'jerking' the kangaroos. He cut the best of the flesh into thin strips, taking all the fat and bones from it, and drying it in the sun, which was now blazing hot enough to do this.

Dirk watched him at this labour, for he could do nothing yet in the way of movement, as he was fearful lest his wound might break out bleeding afresh.

Two or three times he took out his watch to see if he could find out the cause of the stoppage, but he saw that the mainspring was all right, so at last concluded that some of the desert sand must have got into the works, and reluctantly made up his mind that he would have to do without knowing the time, excepting as far as the sun could guide him.

His surprise, therefore, was very great when, upon once more absently pulling out his watch, to find it again ticking away as usual; according to his reckoning of the sun's course, it must have begun again just about the hour it had left off, so taking exactly a twelve hours' rest.

The jerking operation took Billy all that day and well on

to the half of the next, after which he went off with his dog further a-field, to seek for firewood, and bark, to raise a hut.

So a week passed over, Billy every day getting more meat and going on with his preparations for the wet weather. There was no great trouble in supplying their larder, for with true instincts every day brought droves of game to the range; they also felt that the heights would be their only safe refuge during the time of the floods.

The weather was daily becoming more like rain; not that there were many more clouds in the sky than are often seen even in the dryest seasons, for it is one of the peculiarities of Queensland that day after day heavy rain-bulged clouds are to be seen driving about as if ready to burst at any moment. But these are only mocking water-tanks which float away and empty themselves in the ocean. Now there was a general sense of moisture, while the clouds grew greyer and more diffused as to their edges; in a few more days the rains would be upon them.

Billy had dragged the dead bodies of the natives away from the vicinity of the cavern. He did not trouble to cover them over, and Dirk was not in a position to insist upon this being done, the aboriginal being now master of ceremonies.

At nights they could hear the dingoes wrangling over the bodies; and Dirk knew from the way in which the kangaroo bones had been picked by the hordes of ants, that the skeletons would be thoroughly enough cleared by this time.

Billy was by no means demonstrative, but he was faithful to his duties, and nursed his master with great care. Night and morning he dressed the wound with freshly gathered leaves, so that, when at length the hut was ready, Dirk felt that he might venture with the help of his guide to leave his cave and crawl up the hill.

A painful and slow journey it was, but accomplished without mishap. As they ascended the range, Dirk saw the gleaming skeletons of the six men on the plains, and the four others half-way up; the ants had made clean work of them, so that the bones lay like polished ivory, with the grinning skulls as perfectly prepared as if intended for a museum.

The hut was a great success. Billy had composed the sides with the thickest branches he could find about, covering it completely with skins of the kangaroos, skin side towards the sky, so that it had the appearance of a tent. He had also carpeted the inside with skins three or four ply thick, so that it felt as soft as the cushions of an Oriental divan. Outside he had stacked a huge pile of firewood, and as there had been no scarcity of skins, he had covered this also with them. Dirk felt as he regarded this big week's work that he had been in luck's way to have chosen such a gem of a companion.

He praised it all up, and Billy's eyes danced with pleasure, for the nearer we are to Nature, the more we like to be praised for our efforts.

If nothing else had proved that the rains were coming on, the change within the past few days in the landscape would have done so. A week before it had been an arid desert, with only a few powdered roots of grass on the more sheltered parts. But now the whole country seemed to be transformed into green fields, while the range looked like a fertile terrace, fresh young grass springing up with almost magical quickness on every side of the hail-ploughed ground.

Dirk also saw with satisfaction that they were not likely to require their jerked meat while in their present quarters, as on every side of them he observed droves of wild game feeding on the plains at the foot of the range, and keeping as closely to it as they could. When once the rain began to pour, these vast plains would first become miry swamps, then an ocean, and the animals knew it.

. . . . . .

On the morning of the second day after they had removed to the hilltop, the rains began to fall. The fierce hot gales had entirely ceased, these tempests which blew the clouds from the land; and now all was still and sweltering like the atmosphere of a vapour bath. Their jerked meat felt soft and flabby; while rust began to grow upon the blades of their knives, pistols, and rifle-barrels, and a general limpness and dampness pervaded everything.

It was raining when they woke up, and had been most of the night, a soft, light, persistent rain, which never left off day or night for six or seven days, accompanied at intervals

by rolling claps of thunder and fierce lightning flashes, while all through the night the wildfire played along the horizon.

In two days' time the plains began to show gleaming tracks, like quicksilver between the hummocks. On the fourth day it was like a lake with hardly an interruption all round, while the animal life sought the lower sides of the ranges. It looked like an island in the midst of an ocean.

After the first week the rain came on heavier, until it seemed as if the heavens had opened and that another general flood was overtaking the earth. Straight down it fell as if from the rose of an immense watering-pot, heavy as the heaviest thunderstorm in England; yet withou intermission day or night for three weeks and a half, the large drops splashing on all sides, and so closely together that it looked almost as if the air was filled with solid water. When the light was strongest in midday, they looked like crystal threads, scintillating up and down with a blinding dazzle.

The plains were now like a tumultuous ocean, tossing up and down as if with a current, and eddying wildly round about the rocks. Also they saw at times great trees coming floating along, with their branches and leaves trailing about like the tresses of drowned women.

A weird scene of loneliness and desolation, making Dirk feel like a shipwrecked sailor upon an uninhabited island.

After this the weather gave signs of clearing up, although it seemed as if that great sheet of water would never drain away. It was now over the top of the upper ledge of their cave, a turbid ocean bounded only by the grey horizon.

On the fifth week the rains began to fall as in the first week, only more irregularly. At first they cleared up for intervals of half an hour at a time, then for two or three hours at a stretch; and finally the mists rolled away, and the sun poured down its fierce tropic rays once more. The rain season was over.

Dirk and Billy had both been busy during the six weeks, and living fairly comfortably, for there was no lack of game; in fact, it looked almost as if they had come here for their special use. Emus, bustards, scrub-turkeys, cockatoos, pigeons, crows, opossums, kangaroos, wombats, etc. They

had all grown tame in this circumscribed space, and the birds hardly flew away at their approach, they doubtless felt it to be useless; so that Billy and the dog only had to go out and take them.

They had not always, however, fire, for sometimes their wood would not light. Indeed, after the first week, no fire could be kept in outside, and even inside it was a difficult matter. However, Dirk very soon learned to eat and enjoy raw beef, after which he felt himself thoroughly independent of civilisation; for with the first slice of beef that he ate with enjoyment, he shook himself free of all the obligations and necessities of society. His boots were soleless, and his clothes in rags; as they were only an encumbrance, which made him feel uncomfortable when wet, he tossed them aside and hobbled about like Billy and father Adam. Then indeed he felt himself to be a thoroughly emancipated man.

His wound also had so far recovered that he was able to limp about and help Billy.

This mishap and the flood decided him as to his future course. He felt it to be utterly out of the question for him to continue his journey on foot, even if he could have waited upon the draining of the water and the after drying of the soil. With the sight of the floating trees, the idea had come to make a raft, and float himself southward as far as he could; they had provisions enough to last them for many a day while sailing along.

He noticed that the trees always came from the north, and floated as if impelled by some current towards the south, that is, those which got past the rises.

Some of those floating trunks, however, rested against the northern side of their mountain island, and it was upon these that Billy and himself had been busy for the past five weeks.

They collected as many of the smaller detached limbs as they could, strapping them together with thongs made by cutting up some of their kangaroo skins; after which they built up a platform with some cross pieces, as he had seen the New Guinea natives do when they wanted to cross a river. Lastly, making a fairly good deck with branches, leaves, and whole skins, by the time the rain gave over, they were all ready to load up and start.

On the morning after the rain had entirely stopped, they carried all their provisions down to the raft; and after tying them securely with coverings of skins and thongs, they made ready to loose away.

Dirk was glad that he had taken the precaution to secure the raft to a large boulder; for they found that the flood, although rather increased than diminished, was rushing with a tremendous swirl and eddy round the mountain towards the south-west.

At length they were all ready, poles in hand; for they had fixed a plentiful supply of the straightest branches they could find as oars and guiding-posts.

The dog they tied up to one of the cross limbs, much against his doggish will, for, like his master, he dearly appreciated liberty; and then with a sigh of half regret, half dread, Dirk cut the moorings, and in another moment they were turning round and tossing upon that rushing tide.

Round the western end of their six weeks' home they swept. The flood was now rushing like a mill-stream, full fifteen feet in depth, so that they had to look out constantly for jutting points, until they were clear of the last cliff; after which they floated almost in a direct line southward, at a rate which Dirk reckoned to be from six to eight miles an hour.

They looked behind after they were thoroughly on their way, to see their island receding and growing less very quickly towards the north, a green land, and felt as if they were leaving home.

How beautiful it looked with its rocks, green grass, and many cascades falling over its sides into that clay-tinted ocean, and the white-clouded sky above. They were now embarked upon an unknown journey without the power to control their course; chance waifs giving themselves up to the will of a capricious tide, and going they knew not where, or what the end would be.

But Dirk had been so long the shuttlecock of Fate, that he did not trouble himself greatly about it. As for Billy, so long as he could lie on his back and eat when inclined, he was perfectly content.

Southward they floated, and the island became a purple speck, through the fumes of the setting sun, upon that

mighty ocean, ever becoming more hazy and smaller each time they turned their heads.

The last time they turned they could only see a confusion of purple and orange masses of clouds; their six weeks' home had vanished into the general glory of that semi-tropical sunset sky. Then the scarlet sun went down with a long trail of lustre from the west; and fixing their faces resolutely towards the pale but darkening south, they resigned themselves to their fate.

CHAPTER XIV

WAITING AND WEEPING

'OH, my husband, my husband, will he be taken next?' This was the constant moan of the lonely wife and bereaved mother, as she lay at night tossing about sleeplessly upon her pillow, with the white face of her dead baby for ever before her eyes.

The little dainty Bell had been hurried away and buried as quickly as possible, so that her poor mother only got one glimpse of the sweet little white face before she was nailed up and hidden for ever from sight. Ah me! how flower-like and beautiful these alabaster lamps look just after the soul light has gone out! How we would like to keep them beside us if we could—if we could!

Her brother took the funeral expenses and ceremonies from her shoulders, and did his duty conscientiously and well, according to his lights. It was only a little child, and the sooner these things were got over the better, he thought, for all parties, particularly for the mother. Therefore he made his arrangements to get it done quietly and quickly and with as little expense as possible, out of consideration for her and her absent husband, so that he would not have too much to refund when he got home.

So they hurried the little shell away, and bundled her under the ground as quickly as it could be done with decency. She died on Sunday, and they buried her on Tuesday, the mother lying half unconscious of it all and unresisting.

Hardly had the doctors announced that the spirit had fled before the grandmother rushed in and flung open all the windows; the next thing she did was to pack up all the little one's dresses and clothing and send them off to the wash.

She even went the length of cleaning the last little pair of

boots Bell had worn, so that when the poor mother got these relics again there was no trace of her darling about them. Yet she could not condemn the grandmother for this officious haste and supercleanliness, as it was done unconsciously and without any intention of wounding, only that her nature could not enter into sensitive feelings so utterly beyond her. Also she could not understand that there was anything coarse in her action when she sent down all the things freshly ironed and folded on the Sunday succeeding the death, to recall, all too vividly, the baby who had worn and soiled them.

How could she, who thought that the taking away of the child would be a blessed relief for all parties. She, who had never allowed herself to notice any of the little one's winning ways. She, who had never taken it into her arms. How could any one understand, unless true love gave them eyes to see and hearts to know?

But to the mother, what were those polished boots and freshly smelling clothes compared to the mud-stains and dirt that the little dead hands and feet had made and stamped upon them. She wept and felt doubly bereaved and desolate as she locked them all away; the baby Bell had been washed and carefully brushed away for ever.

Not even a likeness, only the rough sketch which her father had once made, and a little lock of the golden hair.

Mrs. Davelock got many letters of condolence; flowers were sent for the small mound; and all the neighbours who had known the little one mourned sincerely for her loss.

Then the sheriff came in all his Bumble-like pomp and arrogance and tortured her with cruel suspicious questions, for the death was sudden. He delivered her a severe lecture upon her carelessness in having poison in the house, until she grew almost mad.

After him the papers took it up with comments; all of them, however, kindly and sympathetic, except one, the editor of which, being a great social reformer, cast very unworthy reflections upon the poor mother, as great social reformers will think it their pious duty to do, when they can with impunity.

It was well for the personal dignity of this overbearing official and local editorial reformer that they had only a

broken-hearted, defenceless woman, and not her husband to deal with. Otherwise they might have repented their unmanly and heartless ruffianism.

When they buried Bell, they did not trouble opening a fresh grave, but crushed her, where they could find room, in a corner, with her head against the walk, so that even in this the mother found no consolation; for the little head, so dearly loved and so proud in life, lay where the careless feet of passers-by could trample over it.

They trampled upon the mother's heart when they passed over that head, for her heart lay with her child, as the poet Roden Noel says—

> 'I am lying in the tomb, love,
> Lying in the tomb,
> Tho' I move within the gloom, love,
> Breathe within the gloom.
>
> Men deem my life not fled, dear,
> Deem my life not fled,
> Tho' I with thee am dead, dear.
> I with thee am dead,
> Oh! my little child.'

What a dull, lonely house that was without the music of the silvery lisping voice, with the only one who could have comforted her so far away, and silent also, for the children walked about on tiptoe with hushed voices. And the dog—her dog—lay on the hearth-rug, with his nose flat upon the ground, missing his playmate, and wondering why she did not come back to him.

Every morning 'Tweed' would go out with a glimmer of expectancy in his eyes, visiting all the cottages to which they had been accustomed to go, and all her walks, showing that he was seeking for her; and at night he would come back with drooping head and disappointed look, to lie down once more and wait for the next morning.

Sometimes he would, however, suddenly start up and look earnestly on the high shelf where her toys had been laid, as if he saw something which the others could not; then he would leap up and try to get at them, barking furiously all the while. Perhaps the dog did see his little mistress in all the glory of her heavenly robes sorting her toys—who knows?

But at that time she did not come back to her mother, although the poor woman prayed nightly for her to come in a dream, if she could show herself nohow else.

The time came, however, when she visited the dreams of that lonely mother constantly, but not then. Perhaps she had her place to prepare and duties to perform before she could comfort her adoring mother.

Meanwhile the slow dull weeks passed away, and no sign came from her husband to let her know if he was still alive. She moved about her duties listlessly, or lay and moaned and wept and waited.

CHAPTER XV

A RAFT JOURNEY AND AFTERWARDS

FOR three days and nights the voyagers floated almost due south. Clearly the waters were coming down with them and following the course of the valleys and depressions towards Lake Eyre, in which, possibly, they would empty themselves and carry them also if they met with no obstacle on the way. At parts they moved very slowly, yet ever southward, or with a slight inclination towards the south-east; while the sea seemed almost motionless around them, and they feared lest they might get stuck up with the many snags and submerged trees which shot up their limbs in every direction, making the water appear even shallower than it really was, for it was only at times that their guiding-poles could touch bottom.

At other times they got caught in a current and were swept along with great velocity between submerged banks. At these times they felt easy in their minds, for there was no impediment in the way, as the current bore them well down the centre. Rivers these were which had overflowed their banks, except in the very high parts, and evidently, for the time being, made new courses along the plains.

Where the water became shallowest and the trees denser, they had a busy time with their poles, clearing away and steering. By day they could do this; but during the night, after the young moon had set, they just left the raft alone, waiting until light came, wherever they stuck, so to clear off again.

The days were dry and hot, therefore it was a pleasant enough sail; for they had provisions in plenty and no lack of drinking water all about them. And Dirk felt cheerful, for his wound was almost healed, and they were making better progress than they could have done on foot. Very soon

would the journey be over, although it had lasted longer than he calculated upon at the start. When not engaged steering, he busied himself, as he had done on every available occasion during the journey down, preparing his sketches and notes. His knapsack was waterproof, so that his work had been well preserved, and now he was hopeful of making a good show by the time he reached Melbourne.

On the third day they could plainly see that the waters were draining away much more rapidly than they could float. Large tracks of ground were beginning to appear above the surface, so that at times they could hardly push themselves along within the water tracks. In another day, if they did not float into some river, they would be swamped to a certainty. It was on the fourth morning that they came to a dead stand; they had entered what they thought to be a clear-flowing creek, and gone along it sluggishly for several miles, when quite suddenly they found it spread out in all directions into little branches and lose itself in a muddy swamp. They were grounded, and must make the best of it until the soil got hard enough to travel.

'Where are we now, do you think, Billy?' asked Dirk of his companion.

'Cooper Creek,' responded Billy, after a careful look round.

Dirk felt a thrill of joy. They could not be more than a hundred miles from the end of their foot journey, Hergott Springs.

'Bad place this for black fellow and fever,' continued Billy solemnly, 'Yes, look out, white fellow, and get shooters ready.'

This was not so cheerful; yet Dirk felt that forewarned is forearmed, and he did not intend to be taken unawares so near the end of his journey. Therefore getting once more into his tattered habiliments, he got out his quinine bottle and cartridges, and so prepared for all emergencies.

Around them spread a dreary landscape of mud and rapidly draining-away water. Only for the experiences lately passed through, Dirk could not have credited his eyes. Only an hour ago they had a clear river seemingly before them; and now, as he looked back upon their trail, he could only see intersections of gleaming fluid.

Yesterday they had floated along a flowing tide, to-day it

was all a slimy swamp. To-morrow or the next day it would be a series of green fields with delicious budding grass; and after a week or two of fertility, a dry desert once more, with powdered dust instead of fodder.

Still, if they were near to Cooper's Creek, called by some 'the diamond of the desert,' and, as Dirk had read, at some parts, even in dry weather, over two miles in width—a splendid creek, with broad reaches of water, covered with aquatic birds, and its pools stocked with fish, with green stretches of grass all round, and the banks lined with fine gum-trees—they were pretty safe.

So Dirk had read from the explorers' notes on this river, and felt, like Billy, that they must be now close to the mouth of it, where it empties itself into Lake Eyre. Where they lay it was boggy enough, and covered with tangled masses of stunted shrubs, while beyond they could see stretches of heavy timber on the more rising ground.

There were no signs of natives, but this they did not wonder at, as over this swamp no human being could as yet pass, native or white man, nor would they be able for the next day or two. Besides, they were well sheltered where they lay by the clusters of bushes which covered the plain, therefore they need not trouble themselves greatly yet as to their future; all they had to do was to wait.

Dirk had read that the natives about this part were cannibals, and he asked Billy about it.

'No, no,' replied Billy decidedly, when he understood what was asked him. 'They bad fellows, and will kill, but no eat you. Why should they? Plenty of fish to be got here.'

It was a most uncomfortable day on their raft; for, as the waters subsided, the rank vegetable fumes rose, filling the air with unwholesome odours, so that Dirk nearly fainted once or twice with the pestiferous smells, his head throbbing as if it would burst, and his limbs weighed down as if they had been loaded with iron.

He tried to ward off the weary oppression, which was creeping over him, with large doses of quinine, pouring the white powder into his hand and licking it up like sugar, without any other effect except to add to the throbbing of his brain and a singing sound, as if a thousand bees were buzzing inside.

The mosquitoes also came out in myriads, covering them all over and stinging them constantly; large spotted mosquitoes who swung sucking in their blood, and would not be shaken off.

They were not far from salt water, for they saw gigantic marsh-mallows and mangrove bushes on all sides of them, always a sure sign of the vicinity of brine; while away over by the south, where the huge and heavy timber grew the densest, they saw that the ground took a decided rise, although closely covered all over.

'Over there runs Cooper Creek,' remarked Billy, pointing to those southern rises. 'Black fellow very bad there, you bet. Big lake all salt down there.' He pointed as he spoke towards the west.

All day Dirk tried to fight down the fever which he felt creeping over him, and taking firmer hold of his blood every breath which he drew in of that insidious gas which was now exhaling from the deadly swamp. But in vain, the lassitude crept over him swiftly and surely, which no will force could shake off; the desire to lie still and let things go on as they liked, while a sleepy numbness seemed to settle upon his limbs and press down his heavy eyelids.

Billy knew what was wrong with his employer, but he could not help him, only by a word now and again of encouragement, which did not amount to much.

'Bymby, to-morrow we will leave this place, then you all right, you see.'

It was a noxious lair where they had been forced to encamp. As Dirk lay in that torpor looking over the sides, he could see at times the sun-heated slime overturned and the half-drowned reptiles come up to warm themselves, a loathsome sight which made him shiver as he looked, sending icy chills over his body, to be followed by intervals of consuming fire.

Billy and the dog sat still while they waited and chewed, without ceasing, at the jerked strips of kangaroo flesh.

By and by the sun went down, and the vapours grew cold as a November fog in London. Billy covered Dirk with layer upon layer of kangaroo skins, but nothing could keep out that icy vapour. All through the night Dirk lay with his teeth chattering like castanets and his knees knocking together, longing for, yet dreading, the day.

Another day of stifling heat passed; the mud getting a grey crust upon it, and the trees beyond shimmering through that quivering gaseous atmosphere. A long day of burning torture to Dirk, his body swelling up to gigantic proportions with dropsy, and the distended skin shining and transparent like a blown-out bladder. He could not have moved a finger now to have saved his life; torpid but sleepless he lay, wondering that the human skin could stretch so much without bursting.

Billy dared not light a fire in case the smoke would attract some of the tribes who might now be returning to their fishing haunts by the river; but he did what he could to make Dirk comfortable that night. He placed his dog on one side of him while he took the other, so that Dirk did not shiver so much as he had done the night before.

By and by he fell asleep, worn out with the pricking pain all over him, and had a most enjoyable dream of being in a Turkish bath, with the distant sounds of soft music lulling him to sleep; it was like a gentle sleep within a sleep. When he woke up, the morning sun was shining genially down upon him, while he was astonished at the lightness of his spirits and his freedom from pain. He had gone to sleep smarting all over as if a thousand needles were pricking him, indifferent to life and its sorrows; he woke up buoyant and as if he could fly instead of walk over the plain. Yesterday he had lain like a prize pig; to-day he felt like a skeleton.

The coverings were drenching wet, and as he sprang up he saw he had been lying in a pool of moisture; and as he looked at his naked arms and legs, he felt he had no cause to be proud of them, for never had he seen such an exhibition of thinness. All the flesh seemed to have melted from him, leaving only skin and bone loosely hanging together. Even Billy grinned as he looked upon the scarecrow.

'This beats the divine "Sarah" all to sticks,' he cried, looking at his attenuated extremities disconsolately.

'You no too heavy to cross the swamp to-day,' replied Billy, who did not understand the simile.

'I feel as if I could be quite safe on an eighteenth-part-of-an-inch sheet of ice. Hurry up, Billy, and let us get out of this slough of despond.

After a hasty breakfast of jerked meat they slung their baggage over their shoulders and struck out for the river,

leaving the raft without a regret. It was soft travelling for the first mile or two with the thinly crusted mud shaking beneath their feet, but afterwards they got into firm ground, although much obstructed by the increasing denseness of the scrub.

However, they got on, and by night were able to pitch their camp by the side of the broad and swiftly flowing Barco River. That night, as Dirk fell asleep, he felt as if he was almost home, and all his *troubles past.*

CHAPTER XVI

MIGHTY MOLOCH

MR. MOLOCH was growing more lordly in his demeanour, and more mighty every day, making stern laws in his department, and moving about as majestic and king-like as his diminutive person would permit him to look.

In bodily stature he was exactly five feet four inches, the size of the Venus de Medici, but in imagination he felt a colossal statue of Jove.

In the last letter from the Melbourne agent there had been expressed grave fears for the adventurous Dirk, of whom no word had been heard. The floods up country were reported to be uncommonly heavy and disastrous; so that unless specially favoured by Providence, Mr. Garland (who really liked and admired Dirk) feared the worst.

'So much for Buckingham,' as Richard the Third said and 'Mighty Moloch' thought while he signed the order for Mrs. Davelock's fourth quarterly allowance; they were always very exact about money matters in the firm of Grabbleson and Co. What they agreed to and signed, they executed to the dead letter of the law.

'I think I shall be able to hand over the remainder of this dead fool's salary to his widow before another quarter falls due, and so end that business,' Mr. Moloch murmured genially as he leaned back in his chair and softly rubbed his knuckly hands complacently together.

He had received an intimation of the death of little Bell, but had pitched that into the waste-basket along with the tear-blotted letter which accompanied it, from the deluded mother, who thought this man to be the friend of her husband, without troubling to answer it. What was it to him who died, or how they perished, so long as he got on?

And he was getting on uncommonly well; this Australian idea particularly, which Dirk had put into his crafty but empty little head, and which he took the whole credit of, had given him a decided rise; in fact, because of it, he had been promoted to be a director in the firm, a position which gave him almost unlimited influence and authority.

Two years before this he had been a very humble-minded and obsequious little struggling artist, with just the amount of ability which the art training-schools could put into him, and without a spark of originality or native talent.

He had been taught in the schools to draw correctly and to put on his colours after the soft and pretty orthodox pattern; and he had adopted water-colours to stipple and finish his work carefully.

But there was nothing to distinguish it from the hundred and one workers whom the art schools turn out year after year, and who fill exhibitions with conscientious little water-colours. A country maiden with a white hood driving a flock of geese along a country lane; or a country maiden with a white hood looking over a stile, with the title 'Waiting'; or a country maiden with a white hood standing up in a hay- or corn-field, with the title 'Working.' Visitors to exhibitions will see them year after year staring at you, with their carefully stippled cheeks and dovelike expressions in the same position, with the same titles; and in finely-gilt mounts and frames, with different signatures only upon them. They have stared for years at English visitors, and will continue to stare to the end of the chapter as representative English Art.

He had been a struggling and humble walker along this well-trodden path for years, just making enough to keep him as penuriously respectable as a city-clerk, before some patron or other recommended him to this billet of art-editor. A godsend for him at the time, as it enabled him to live independent of his poorly paid, highly finished water-colours.

He had come at first to this office very conciliatory and mild with all who approached him; but no mortal man could be an art-editor, or the doorkeeper to a stage, for long and remain humble, far less a narrow-minded and often rebuffed little artist as Mr. Moloch had been in the past.

Gradually he had grown to the importance and arrogance of his position as grand arbitrator over the bread and cheese

of other artists, who came to him humbly, as he himself had gone in the past with his own portfolio to the different offices. He had learned from bitter experience the most mortifying words to use, so as to make the applicant wince and remember with writhing self-hatred how vile and mean-spirited a thing an artist may become who has to work for his daily bread. He also knew exactly how long to keep them waiting outside, with the office-boys laughing at their futile attempts to look dignified and unconcerned, and just when to receive them, as the starch was all taken out of them, and they were in limp and dejected enough condition to do business with. How to make appointments with people who were of no social importance, and who when they called, confident that there was something at last to do, to turn them away again with the word, keeping them waiting expectantly for an hour or two, that the editor was 'engaged,' or had 'gone home.' There was a back passage in the establishment and a private staircase, so that the editors might be able to play these pretty little tricks when they thought them necessary.

He learned, in fact, everything connected with art-editorial duty. To forget that the men who came to him were men; to fawn and play the amiable when there was something to gain, for these sacred doors could fly open widely to catch a new fly, or for an influential customer, as they could be grimly shut on the poor fly after the blood had been sucked out of him; to be arrogant and overbearing as a money-lender; ungentlemanly and boorish as a pig-driver; and as crafty and false as an Oriental slave-dealer. All these were the duties which he naturally acquired with alacrity.

How haughtily he could now strut past the hanger-on (whom two years ago he would have cringed before), with hardly a sign in response to the other's servile doffing of his hat. Labourers and the British workmen in their moleskins can be independent if they like with their picks or tool-bags on their backs; but the man with his black seedy surtout and portfolio dare not ever, and particularly never, when he approaches his lordly, upstart master. Sometimes, after he has got paid for his servility, he may look disdainfully on the work-stained workman who is lurching past him in the street, but that is only a fleeting surface sneer. He can never feel, even in his most exultant mood, one hundredth part so manly.

The playful badinage, brutal bullying, or lofty contempt of the art-editor must ever be on him; pressing him into the mire of self-abasement, the more especially if he has been brought up or born a gentleman. He may learn in time, if fortune favours him, to be a tyrant or an art-editor himself, but he can never again feel like a man after going through that mill, and bending his neck under that bondage of degradation. With his first endurance of that sneer or condescending pat on the back, he must for ever after take his rank with those unfortunates who paint their faces and eat the bread of shame; and like them he must learn to grin and bear it.

Sometimes Mr. Moloch would speak affably, and sometimes he would retire into a haughty throne of silence, and so crush the heart of the slave who approached him with his art efforts; staring him out of countenance when he dared to be so familiar as to remark that it was a 'good day.' Or again, when the other expected to be snubbed, he would play with him like a cat, or rather like a mangy tortoise-shell kitten with a mouse. Ah! it was a noble and a god-like game this game of the art-master, and no wonder that the little man had come to be known as the 'mighty God Moloch' by those who were classically inclined, and who had to endure him. 'Mighty Moloch' was his short title now among the office-boys, when they saw his little narrow shoulders disappear through the office door, and a very 'mighty Moloch' he felt himself to be, in or out of office.

CHAPTER XVII

FROM FLOOD AND PLAIN

NEXT day, Dirk, Billy, and the dog, crossed the Barco River, still in a state of flood, and flowing rapidly.

They walked along the banks until they came to the narrowest part of the river, and here Billy gave a sample of his wonderful skill with the boomerang, and how much a native can do with this wonderful Australian weapon.

It is only a flat piece of hard wood, in the form of a very blunt V, with sharpened edges. To the centre of this Billy fastened a long thin line, made from the entrails of the birds which he had caught on the way. Then measuring the distance carefully with his eyes from bank to bank, and taking a dead gum-tree on the opposite side as his target, he turned his back upon it, and with a sudden jerk, sent his line-carrying weapon straight from him, and directly away from the object which he intended to reach.

The boomerang at first flew straight as it was sent. Then, as if it had changed its mind and been gifted with vitality, it altered its course, making a wide circular sweep backwards across the river, round the gum-tree on the other side, and gracefully back again into the hand of the thrower. This rude-looking piece of roughly cut wood had done what no other weapon in ancient or modern warfare could have done—twisted the line round the tree, and given them the means of crossing that tumultuous torrent.

The rest was easy. To cut and make strong thongs of their kangaroo skins, and fasten them to the thin line, then draw them with it over the tree and back again; after which, holding on to the thongs, they drew themselves and the dog easily across, and resumed their march.

That night, as they both lay asleep, they got a great fright,

and were nearly discovered. It was the dog who woke up Billy, and apprised him of the presence of natives; there they were, a migrating tribe coming from the south towards the river which they had left.

Dirk and Billy had time to hide themselves amongst the scrub, and watched the natives as they passed in the moonlight. It was then getting on to half-moon, so that they could be seen distinctly; dark naked figures of men, women, and children, going at a great rate, as if in a hurry; the women carrying all the baggage, as usual, and the men only their spears and waddies.

Some of the young men stopped for a moment and bent down to examine the tracks which Dirk and Billy had left behind them. Then Dirk began to feel anxious, and look to the priming of his rifle and revolvers, for the natives are sharp trail-trackers; but evidently they were in too great a hurry to follow these tracks up, for after a loud talking with the others, they rose and hurried on.

'Black fellow behind whom they are frightened about; you look out for big fight bymby,' whispered Billy to Dirk; so they both waited, watchful on the next event.

In about half an hour they could see the pursuers appear on the moonlit plain, a confused multitude; and then Billy became excited, and told Dirk that these were both rival tribes to one another, and enemies to his own people.

'My people not far away, you bet; great big fight bymby.'

The others were not out of sight when the pursuers came up, who having caught sight of their prey, never paused to look for fresh trails, but rushed on.

Then Billy could restrain himself no longer; all the savage instincts were woke up at the sight of two enemies about to engage in conflict, and he felt that he must be in it.

'You white fellow Davelock, lie here quiet and don't move till Billy come back; no one touch you here so long as you don't move. Billy must see big fight, but he come back all that same right, bymby.'

Without waiting for a reply, he glided off like a snake after the last crowd of natives with the dog along with him.

The first party by this time had disappeared within the shadow of the forest, which the others were rapidly nearing.

Between this and where Dirk lay, spread a stretch of comparatively open plain dotted over with stunted trees and low bush, between which lay patches of white sand.

The half-moon shone down from a cloudless sky, showing up objects faintly in the half distance, yet clearly enough when near. Dirk now lay stretched under a close-set scrub, with the leaves drooping over him, so that he could look pretty well about him without being seen.

As he lay looking out and listening for the beginning of the fight, he fancied that he noticed a slight alteration in the landscape before him. Where he could have sworn he had seen bare patches of sand, now appeared to be covered with stunted bushes. Perhaps he would have dismissed this fancy as a delusion of the senses, had it not been that he got fixing his eyes upon one special bald patch over which, to his astonishment, he observed a darkness pass, leaving it for a moment black and lumpy, and then shine out once more, as if a momentary cloud had passed over the moon.

He glanced up quickly to the sky, but could see that it was perfectly clear, without even the vestige of the smallest cloud; and then once more turned his eyes upon this plain, where the bushes appeared to be growing like magic-bushes, and travelling towards the forest.

Whatever could this mean? In his eagerness to find out, he stretched his head from his shelter, forgetful of the caution Billy had given him, and also without looking round him or behind; for he was watching the subtle movements of a low bush, which he saw distinctly change its place about ten yards from where he lay.

It had detached itself from the main shadow of a larger bush, and was now gliding over the bare patch of sand which before had transfixed his eyes.

If he had turned his head at this moment he would have seen another low shrub bearing noiselessly down upon him from the other side. Now it was almost touching his shoulder, when with that spirit instinct which ever warns one of the near proximity of life, he made a motion to look round.

Too late; with one bound the savages were upon him, bearing him down, and burying his face in the sand. Dirk lay half smothered and without the power to move.

In a moment afterwards he found himself bound, hand and

foot, and turned face upwards, with the moon shining on him, and two unkempt naked aboriginals stooping over him.

'Ugh! white fellow, no good, Bale-bougeree!' exclaimed one of them in tones of disgust to the other.

'What the dickens is it?' asked Dirk, surprised at the unexpected attack and getting the better of his alarm.

'You white fellow wait here, me no want you.'

They had left him bound hand and foot even as they spoke, so that Dirk felt he had no other option except to lie where he was and wait on the return of Billy. Therefore, wriggling once more into the shadow, he turned on his side and watched the receding army of trees, and wondered what would happen next.

Presently he heard from the forest a most appalling chorus of yells which informed him that the battle of the tribes had begun, while the bush-covered followers, now close to the forest, flung away their disguises in a heap and rushed wildly in to join the *mêlée*.

Blood-curdling shrieks and yells rung out which froze Dirk's very marrow as he listened helplessly under his shelter. He could imagine that he saw them hacking at one another without any thought of surrender or mercy, and thought of his own fate when the victors returned, heated with the battle and filled with the lust of blood. As he listened and thought, he felt how much worse a battle sounded with the assailants out of sight than if he could only have seen them.

By and by the turmoil appeared to be coming nearer, and as if the vanquished were beating a retreat in his direction. Even while he strained his eyes to watch, he saw the fighters break from cover and rush in his direction, filling the night air with appalling howls; while a confused mass followed, yelling savagely as they brained those whom they overtook with their waddies, and pitched their spears after the others.

About a couple of dozen were flying, while over fifty pursued.

Dirk noticed in the very front row of the hunted a long lithe figure bounding along, followed by a dog.

'Billy, by the gods! and showing a clean pair of heels,' muttered Dirk, watching the speed with which his companion made tracks over that moonlit plain.

Billy, with the quadruped, bore straight down upon him, and in another moment was at his side blurting out :—

'Quick, white fellow Davelock, shoot, shoot, they are killing my people.'

'I am tied here like a trussed chicken and can't move.'

'Oh!' Billy jerked out his knife in a second and severed the grass cords. 'Now quick, shoot, white fellow.'

'Which of them will I shoot, Billy?' inquired Dirk, grasping his rifle and kneeling down.

'Black fellows coming last.'

Dirk had no difficulty in finding an aim, for the hunters were coming on in a compact crowd, while the hunted were scattered widely as they ran helter-skelter. Thus, without aiming very particularly, he blattered away as fast as he could cram cartridges into his breechloader, filling the whole place about him with white smoke, so that in a moment or so he could see nothing. Only a shrill cry burst out now and again after the loud yell of consternation which greeted his first discharge.

After he had fired off about half-a-dozen rounds, he paused to let the clouds clear away and see the effect. There were no more sounds either from hunted or hunters, and Billy was pausing amongst the smoke, also silent.

A moment afterwards when the air became clear Billy clapped his hands with savage glee.

'Ha! ha! big black fellow all run away, they no got any more fight in them.'

It was true, and the unexpected aid had turned the tide of victory. There they were in full retreat toward the forest, while sixteen out of the twenty of Billy's tribe stood irresolute at about forty paces distant on the south side of the bush under which they had fired.

Then Billy, seeing the coast clear, went out and explained matters to his friends, who had been the ones that had tied Dirk up, all unconscious of the service which he was destined shortly to render them, the result being that after the introductions and congratulations were got over, they spent the rest of the night, or rather early morning, burying their slain friends, and utilising their dead enemies in the way of body grease; after which, with the early dawn, they all started to rejoin the women of the tribe, then located half a

day's journey further south and a little way north of Hergott Springs.

That night was the last which Dirk spent with his faithful companions, Billy, and the no less reliable dog friend, the nameless one. They had a corroberree over their doubtful victory which Dirk sat and watched, while for the first time since he had left Normanton enjoying a pipe. It was a very strong old cutty with about half-an-inch of stalk left, and the tobacco was the vilest kind that could possibly have been procured, and yet Dirk sucked it in and enjoyed it, as he had never enjoyed the finest 'imperial,' dreaming dreams, as he puffed it out, fill after fill.

Next day, followed by the entire tribe, male and female, and children, he made his picturesque entry into Hergott Springs, shirtless and bootless, with a pair of trousers hardly decent, and the brimless remnant of an old, soft, felt, billy-cock hat; his hair hanging over his shoulders and his beard upon his breast.

A sorrowful farewell it was between Billy and him, in which the voiceless and titleless mongrel came in for his share of well-deserved caresses. After which, and paying his guide the wage agreed upon, he found that he had just sufficient money to pay for a shirt, new hat, cheap trousers, Blucher boots, and his fare down to Adelaide.

The Hergott Springs people gave him quite an ovation when they heard where he had come from and the dangers he had passed through, and vied with each other who would show him most hospitality. He did not tell them how hard up he was. However, he gladly took the offer of a bed, supper and breakfast, seeing that they took it as a compliment on his part what he really was unable to pay for. He said nothing about his exchequer, but spent a merry night, and enjoyed the rare delight of fresh sheets, and a shower-bath next morning.

After a good sleep he was up by daybreak, making his accustomed sketch of the township, and then, amid hearty handshakes and good-wishes from these brave and honest pioneers, he took his seat in the railway carriage and was off towards Adelaide as fast as steam could carry him.

When he arrived at Adelaide, his first visit was to the post-office for letters, where he learned, with a pang at the heart of

disappointment, that there had been three packages lying for months waiting on him; but that according to instructions written on the outside, they had been returned to Mr. Garland only a week before, signifying thereby that he had been given up.

What was he to do now? He hadn't a cent to pay for either hotel, telegram, or railway to Melbourne, and he didn't know a soul in Adelaide to whom he could apply.

As he stood outside the post-office thinking over these matters, he mechanically drew out his watch to see the time. One look at its honest truth-telling face gave him the grand idea; it was now his only friend, and good enough to be his sponsor for the expenses of the journey.

Quickly he glanced up and down the street, in search of the Lombardian sign of the poor man's friend, but nothing in the glittering form of the three golden balls met his anxious eyes, only across the broad and beautifully kept street he discerned a watchmaker's and jeweller's shop. Perhaps that might do; his watch wanted cleaning and had cost him forty guineas, so he would try if he could work the oracle.

When he got to the shop and explained his position, the jeweller, after examining it carefully, said that it would be the better of a general overhauling, and when Dirk explained his peculiar circumstances, the shop-owner agreed to let him have ten pounds upon it, Dirk telling him that he would send in a week or so and redeem it. Once more happy, and in funds, he rushed back again to the post-office to wire his safe arrival.

Here another disappointment awaited him; the communication had been stopped—some accident to the wires, which would take a day or so to get into order again. 'No matter!' he thought, 'I'll start at once and be there first'; so he went off to the station to find that he had just time for a hasty snack before the train started.

Once more on the road. What a throbbing impatient heart he had as he vainly tried to rest while the train flew on! How the green trees seemed to crawl past! how slow it all felt, with that swiftly beating heart, and brains thudding two to one against the thumping of the engine!

CHAPTER XVIII

A DRAMATIC APPEARANCE

THEY had given up Dirk Davelock. It was now five months, and they had not heard from him; while the reports from up-country of disasters from the unusually heavy floods, left them without a hope as far as he was concerned.

Mr. Garland sat in his office holding a final consultation with Hodge Hinderlans and the editor prior to the sailing of Hodge with the melancholy news to Metaltown. They were all depressed about this termination of the work; even Hodge, now that he need no longer fear any rivalship, thought upon the many services which Dirk had rendered him, and inwardly reproached himself for his narrowness and ungracious reception of Dirk's friendship. It is one thing to be jealous of the success of the living, but quite another matter to keep up ill-will towards the dead.

Besides, Hodge was not a bad sort of a fellow, when things were going well with himself, and there was nothing to stir up his bile. He liked company, and Dirk had been good company, he now felt, on the voyage out. He also liked admiration, and Dirk had always admired his work. Of course he was not capable of a generous or disinterested action, or of expressing himself in praise of any one, however much he expected it himself; but this proceeded more from a sincere and honest conviction that no one else deserved encouragement or praise except himself, than from narrowness in its strictest sense.

He was narrow and jealous-minded, and easily moved to sudden and dull spite, but he had too much self-conceit to be a long or a strong hater. When any one was praised before him he would grow vindictive and sulky, while the applauses

lasted, but with a change of public opinion he would resume his good nature and allow his malice to slumber.

As long as Dirk had been leader, and the papers had extolled him, Hodge would gladly have seen him carried off by smallpox or any other infectious disease; but now that Dirk had been silent and forgotten for five months, all Hodge's evil wishes had died a natural death, and he could only think upon him with regret as one of the most unselfish companions he had ever been with.

As he sat there with the others in that little Melbourne office, and thought upon the lonely voyage home, he grew melancholy and sympathetic.

He had finished his easy share of the work in Australia, and knew that he was sure of a couple of years' employment in England now that there was no one to share it with him. In two more days the liner in which he had taken his passage would sail from Williamstown. His baggage was all aboard, he felt that he was the favourite of fortune, for he had all the ease of the expedition, Dirk had gone through all the danger and hard work, while he was about to receive all the honours and reward, sure as he was of Mr. Moloch's patronage.

He was now meditating on these matters as he sat with downcast face, and also with a sense of remorse, on several treacherous reports which he had sent home to his patron in his capacity of watcher and monitor, and which he might have spared his trusting friend. Now that death had removed this friend from his path, he even felt a savage discontent and hatred towards Mr. Moloch who had appointed him to such an unworthy task, blended with a wish that he could pay him out for it. Altogether Hodge was very dissatisfied with himself and uncomfortable; therefore, in consequence, extra unsociable.

'Well, gentlemen,' observed Mr. Garland, 'I think we have settled all business matters, and the only word which has to be said is "Good-bye." You will take home these letters with you which have been returned from Adelaide, and deliver them into the hands of our poor friend's widow.'

'Yes,' responded Hodge, putting his hand upon the three sealed packets, and preparing to tie them up together, while the editor and agent both rose to their feet.

At this moment the sound of a cab was heard outside the door, and then, while they still listened, a rush of hasty feet, up the stairs, with a cheery loud voice, which made them all start incredulously, shouting out to the office-boy:—

'Just see that the cabman brings all my traps in right, will you? I have squared with him. Mr. Garland in, I suppose?'

Then the door was burst open with Dirk's usual boisterousness, and he appeared before them, laughing and shaking hands all round.

Dirk covered with the dust of that three hundred and fifty miles of hot train journey, lank with his fever, nearly black with the sun, in the cheap store trousers and shirt, and with hair and beard of five months' growth hanging wildly about him, looking more like a desperate and starved bushranger than a representative of such a respectable firm as Grabbleson and Co.

'Hallo!' exclaimed all three in a breath; 'wherever have you started from?'

'The Bush, as you may see,' replied Dirk, spreading out his hands and showing himself off. 'I suppose you had given me up as dead.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Garland gravely; 'and you look as if you had not been far off from that land of shadows.'

'I have not had the easiest time of it, I admit. What with want of water, too much of it, hail-storms, natives, and fever. However, that is past, and too long a yarn now. I have got back safe, and brought my batch of sketches and manuscript per usual, as nearly up to date as I could manage.'

'Well, I am indeed glad to see you, sketches and all, safe once more,' said Mr. Garland heartily.

Dirk limped outside for his knapsack, and returned with it over his arm.

'You are lame, surely?' observed the editor, as Dirk knelt on the floor to open his knapsack.

'A spear wound,' returned Dirk indifferently. 'Got it about half-way down—almost better now. There, gentlemen, you can turn over my work and examine it while I look at my letters; where are they?'

'Here they are, old fellow,' replied Hodge, handing him

the packages, while he with the others stooped over the knapsack and began to lift out the sketches.

'Thanks, Hodge; we will have a chat presently.'

While they examined the results of his five months' travel, Dirk, with trembling fingers, tore open the three large envelopes, letting dozens of letters escape as he did so, some few from Mr. Melgarf, some from his good friend Mr. Herbert, and the rest in the dear handwriting which he had not seen for so long a time.

He meant to take them all by and by in rotation, but, meantime, looked for the latest dated so that he might assure himself that they were all well. Two broad black-edged envelopes fell out from the cluster of white ones, and with a sudden stoppage of his heart he broke open the uppermost one, only three lines, all blurred and blotted and filled with incoherent sentences of wild grief, but no information. At any rate she was alive. He took up the other—it was the same, for the writer at Applewait thought all the world must know of her woe and loss. But what the letter did not reveal to him the intimation card did, with a suddenness like a lightning flash striking deadly upon his unexpecting heart.

'Ah, my God! my God!' cried Dirk, flinging up his arms, and staggering back from the writing-table where the letter lay.

'What is it?' asked Hodge, looking up from the sketches with the old expression of narrow jealousy in his bilious-coloured eyes.

'My youngest child is dead—poisoned!'

Then the ill-will died out of Hodge's face as he rose up and laid his hand sympathetically on the arm of his companion, with the conventional words which tell so little or so much, according to the meaning conveyed, 'Poor old chap, bear up. I am, indeed, sorry for you!'

BOOK THIRD

NIGHT

CHAPTER I

NEWS ONCE MORE

THREE months had passed since the little Bell had been crushed into her corner of the earth, that is, the portion which her mother had been accustomed to see.

Three months of sleepless misery and unutterable longing for the husband who had been for over five months silent, and for the merry child-voice which could only echo through her dreams.

Three months while the spirit of spring passed over the world, and was now leaving her work for summer to take up and continue.

The turf was green on the little mound in the churchyard, and the daisies and buttercups came up all the larger and fresher in this quiet place than outside by the dusty ways.

The mother did not weep much, but her brown hair grew blanched and her eyes dim, as she went about her daily work. She was comely still, with her Spanish face, yet it was no longer the beauty of a proud young matron, but the silent pathos of a woman fallen into her prime, who has outlived her dream of pleasure.

Her relations did not observe the subtle change, for they did not care to look close; indeed, when the sister-in-law came to see her, she complimented her upon her looks. 'Quite nice-looking you are now, with your young face and

white hair; if Davelock comes back he won't know you again,' she observed flippantly.

'If!' Her lips grew white as she heard the word, which chimed so nearly with the knells so constantly beating upon her desolate heart.

Katie was once more able to be about with the others, and feeling eager to get to school, for she was very ambitious, and felt that she had fallen behind with her lessons, so that it was with great difficulty that her mother could coax her to let all studies alone *until* papa came back.

But although Dr. James had given this patient up as out of present danger, he was very anxious about Mrs. Davelock. For the past three months she had only slept when he gave her a sleeping draught, and her nervous system was completely shattered.

'If she doesn't hear from her husband soon, she will die,' he said on one occasion to her mother.

'Nonsense, doctor, she looks as well as ever she did,' answered the grandmother testily.

The doctor regarded her with a curious contraction of his eyelids; she did not like him and he did not like her.

'Do you think so?'

'Yes.'

'Then I don't.'

He was a stern abrupt man in his ways, who did not know the trick of flattering his customers. He snatched up his hat hastily, and putting it rudely on his head, ran quickly out of the house, and jumping into his gig, drove savagely away.

It was a warm afternoon, and she knew all the children would be out of the way, so the grandmother did a most extraordinary thing for her; she put on her shawl and resolved to go round and pay her daughter the first visit she had made her since her coming to the village.

The poor woman had risen about midday, dazed with her forced sleep, or rather narcotic stupor, with throbbing head and nerves all unstrung, looking helplessly about her at the breakfast dishes yet unwashed, and trying to collect herself sufficiently to begin her duties. The villager who helped her at odd times could not get to her on this day, therefore the place was all confusion—a confusion which she felt incapable of overcoming.

The unexpected sight of her mother in her doorway almost overwhelmed her.

'What is it, mother?' she gasped. 'Anything wrong?'

'No,' answered her mother, feeling just a little ashamed of her long neglect, as she saw that hair so strangely gone white. 'I have come down to see how you were to-day, and—help you to tidy up.'

She seized a knife-board as she spoke and began to polish a knife very energetically. The mother's face was flushed with anger as well as embarrassment. She had come down with a desire to comfort her daughter, touched a little with remorse by the words of the doctor. But the sight of this unloved daughter always enraged her, as it did on the present occasion, so that it was with difficulty she restrained herself sufficiently to speak with decency about the children.

'I am glad that Katie has at last got strong; you will now be able to have a rest.'

'Yes,' said the poor woman; 'if I could only sleep.'

'Why shouldn't you sleep, now that your troubles are all past?'

'My husband——!'

'Oh, he'll come back all right; and if he doesn't, you will have his assurance money.'

'Oh, mother!'

Then the old woman's rage got the better of her discretion, and she broke out into a savage burst of abuse. She reviled her broken-spirited daughter with undutiful conduct in the past, as the wolf reviled the lamb at the stream with polluting the water. Then lashing herself up to a blind fury, all the while rubbing savagely at the knives, she taunted her with want of feeling and heartlessness, launching her words one after another like rapid thunderbolts, and winding up by saying:—

'Such a man as you have, too; it would only serve you right if you were to lose him. Neither wonder than you were punished by the loss of your child!'

It is always horrible to be cursed by a mother, even if the reproaches are deserved, but it is doubly horrible when the words are driven into a wounded and innocent heart.

In former times the daughter would have retorted with passion, for she was high-spirited and hasty in her temper;

but to-day she was broken down, and answered not a word.

The old woman's unjust denunciations were at this moment brought to an abrupt termination by the loud rat-tat of the village postman.

'The long-looked-for letter from Australia, Mrs. Davelock,' he said, smiling, as he handed in a black-edged letter with the well-known handwriting upon it.

'Oh, thank God! thank God!' Mrs Davelock shrieked, as she sprang forward and tore the letter out of his hand, breaking it open and devouring the contents, while the postman stood at the door to hear the news, and the mother bent over her knife-board, with her face hidden and her back towards her daughter.

'He is safe—he is on the road home—and will be here in a day or two.'

'I deserve a glass of whisky for that news, Mrs. Davelock,' said the postman jocularly.

'And you shall have it; two if you like—as many as you can take.' She fumbled in her pocket and brought out some money. 'There, drink to my husband's safe return, for I am so happy—so happy.'

It was a transfiguration. The care-worn face became girlish, so that the grey hair looked like a wig, as she tossed up her arms wildly, and then sank down upon her knees, forgetful of her mother or the postman, and kissing the dear letter from Dirk, while the pent-up stream burst from her eyes and poured in torrents over her cheeks.

Then it was that her mother carefully laid down the knife she had been polishing upon the knife-board, and slid quietly out of the door without speaking, after the postman, who had gone to spread the news that their village hero, the great traveller, was once more on the road home.

CHAPTER II

LANDED

TO the honour of Hodge, it must be said that he had not a single fit of sulks all the way home. No one could possibly have been nicer or more grimly agreeable than he was with his friend Dirk Davelock; but then he had no occasion to sulk, as he had it all his own way, and now became the lion of the hour.

Dirk was too ill and depressed to make himself agreeable to the other passengers. He kept his berth all day, and entered into conversation with no one. When it was dark he sought the deck where he could brood without being seen, and only appeared occasionally to dinner.

Besides, the passengers were a thoroughly Metaltownish company who started no amusements nor concerts, and never laid themselves out to amuse each other as the Australians had done on the voyage out. They divided themselves into castes a few days after boarding, and rigidly kept up the social distinction for the entire voyage, as such travellers will do wherever they are. Dirk felt neither care nor desire to put himself out of his own grief for them; they did not require it—they were company enough in themselves, and the voyage passed quickly enough for them, thinking upon their own importance, and the effect they were producing by their hauteur.

'This is what I call comfortable,' observed Hodge, as he sat on deck, and made leisurely drawings of the passengers, who did not think it derogatory to their dignity to have their likenesses taken. 'Not like the fuss and row going out; so thoroughly home-like this is, Dirk, old fellow.'

'Shoddy,' observed Dirk laconically, as he regarded the

solemn faces which would not unbend for a fortune; and then went to have a pipe near the second cabin quarters.

During his travels he had bitten in very deeply into his salary and over the expenses which he had allowed for himself. In his innocence, before leaving, he had fixed his colonial expenses at ordinary commercial travellers' rates, viz., one guinea per day; he had not taken into consideration the extra distances he would have to travel, nor the rapidity with which he would have to do it; so that the result had been as follows:—

Through studying strictest economy and taking third-class tickets, he had been able to keep within expenses while doing Victoria. He began to lose money in New South Wales. In Queensland it melted more rapidly. The higher up he passed, the more he spent; so that New Guinea and the Torres Straits finished him up and left him nearly one-third of his salary to the bad.

He might have made it up on the voyage home, only that Messrs. Grabbleson and Co. took care of this contingency by adding a little clause to his agreement, whereby travelling expenses only began when he had landed, and ended the day he stepped on board the homeward-bound ship.

'Don't mind that,' said both colonial editor and agent to him, when he mentioned his loss. 'We know the great services you have rendered, and have represented them to the firm fully; they will be sure to refund you for your loss when you square up. We have pointed this out to them as a moral obligation which they cannot possibly overlook.'

Therefore, Dirk, in his own integrity and sad lack of experience of business methods, felt satisfied upon that score. They were both honest men, these, the agent and editor, and had really written about the matter as they said, believing that it would be all right as they had promised; while the firm which he represented only published religious, moral, and instructive works.

At Suez he wrote again to his wife and two friends, Mr. Melgarf and Mr. Herbert, telling them the exact date of the ship's arrival.

After this there was nothing more to do except to wait as patiently as possible and watch the changes as they sailed along, hour after hour, each pulse of the engine bringing them

nearer home. The Suez Canal, with its weary monotony of grey sands. Said, with its conglomeration of nationalities. Malta, with mediæval memories and mendacious guides. Gibraltar, lofty and picturesque. Along by the sun-lighted and sparkling coast of Spain; through the Bay of Biscay, and so on, until they dropped anchor.

It was getting on to dusk when they glided into the docks, and amongst the few who were gathered on the wharf, Dirk recognised his old friend Mr. Melgarf. It was kind of the old man to come this length, Dirk felt, and yet he wished that he had not exactly been the first to welcome him to his native shore. His presence always seemed to be a presage of bad fortune, and it was almost with a shudder that he recalled the last visit to Applewait, which had been followed by such disastrous consequences.

However, there he stood waving his handkerchief, and Dirk felt that he must be content with it now, whatever had to follow.

'Welcome once more to home.' Mr. Melgarf had crossed the gangway as he uttered the cheery words, with the agility of a boy, and was shaking hands vigorously with both Dirk and Hodge.

Dinner was at this moment rung out, which had been delayed until the landing, so that the friends might join in the last sumptuous repast on board, and over which the cooks had excelled themselves.

'I hope that you have been satisfied with your trip, and brought home lots of trophies?' observed the old gentleman, after he had answered all Dirk's eager questions about home.

'Oh, thoroughly,' replied Dirk, lightly, for he had cast aside for the moment carking care. 'We have done wonders in the time we have been away; haven't we, Hodge?'

'At least you have, Dirk,' returned Hodge graciously and modestly. Perhaps the hour of parting had melted him; perhaps a better knowledge of the future than Dirk had moved him to compassion. To-night he could be generous; to-morrow would be time enough to begin business in the orthodox fashion, *i.e.* 'Every man for himself, and the devil for the hindmost.'

'We have both done our level best,' said Dirk, 'and I

think Messrs. Grabbleson and Co. must be hard to satisfy if they are not pleased with the results; what say you, Hodge, eh?'

But Hodge was busy helping himself to the curry, so did not reply.

'I am sure you have both done your best, and I hope they will think so,' said the old man, as the steward paused at his elbow with the dish.

After this they were silent for a time, while they took up the Indian mixture. Hodge was eating his with steady enjoyment, meditating evidently while he ate. Mr. Melgarf sat also with his cold grey eyes upon his fork; and Dirk, while he played with his, for he did not care greatly for this dish, but only took it because it was the correct thing for old travellers to take, felt strangely depressed and dull. The Melgarfian spell was upon him once more, and, somehow, things did not seem so sure as they had done half an hour previously.

After dinner they went through the custom-house officer's hands, and leaving the large packages to be examined afterwards, took only their small hand-bags, and got up to town in time to drive to a hotel where they put up for the night, so as to be near the office for an early call next morning.

It was their last night together, therefore Dirk and Hodge spent it with their pipes and a bottle of wine, together drinking success to the momentous interview of the next day. While Mr. Melgarf was with them, Dirk felt very timid about it, but after he had gone, this feeling wore away, and with the last glass things once more began to look rosy and hopeful.

'I hope I shall be able to catch to-morrow night's train down to Applewait, but I suppose that won't be possible. The old boy will want us both down to dinner, I expect, to hear some of our adventures.'

By the 'old boy,' Dirk meant the grand Mogul, Mr. Grabbleson.

'I expect so,' replied Hodge, puffing out a mouthful of smoke, and watching the circles slowly ascend. 'They tell me that he has a most magnificent place, with no end of livery knocking about. Yes, I expect we shall have to go down and show our paces.'

The next morning after breakfast they both started for the

office, where they were shown without delay into Moloch's sanctum.

He met them graciously, and made them sit down for a chat, as Dirk expected he would, asking what kind of a passage they had home, and a number of the commonplace queries which generally start off business.

'He is pleased,' thought Dirk, as he leaned back and listened, for the conversation had somehow as yet been conducted between Mr. Moloch and Hodge—that is, Mr. Moloch looked towards Hodge with his beaming smile when he spoke, so that Dirk did not get the chance of replying, But as it was only ordinary matters which they talked about, he waited on his time coming.

But Mr. Moloch did not seem to think there was any use in bringing up business upon this first interview, for he went on to talk about the exhibitions of the year, and a number of innovations which had taken place since they had left. Here Hodge was more at home than Dirk, for he had kept up his connections with artists at home, whereas Dirk felt in the dark completely; therefore he kept silent and listened, while the little great man aired his art views.

By and by he was brought up short by a call up the speaking-tube, and after replying to it, announced that Mr. Grabbleson was ready to receive them. With fear and trembling they wended their way through the intricate passages to the inner temple, and once more stood within the awful presence.

Jove—*i.e.* Grabbleson—received them gruffly; and after saying in a surly tone that he was glad to see them back, began to growl at the great expenses, and as yet small profits from the Australian side.

'Not so good,' thought Dirk, as he listened. 'But surely he cannot expect returns yet before the work is published.' However, he did not utter his thoughts aloud, but waited for something more definite to come either in the way of praise or blame.

Nothing of the sort came, however; and, after a few moments of subdued thunder and moody looks from the mighty master, his satellite, Moloch, retreated once more with them into his sanctum.

'There, that is over satisfactorily,' he observed, smiling

and rubbing his hands pleasantly together. 'Now, gentlemen, I suppose you will want a few days off duty to see your friends? You, Mr. Davelock, will be eager to get home?'

Yes,' said Dirk; 'if you can spare me for a few days.'

'Oh yes, you can have eight or ten days, if you like, as there is nothing in trim yet; and, as we have your address, if we want you before that, we can wire. Yes, I think you may safely reckon upon eight days' rest in the bosom of your family, at any rate.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'Do you also wish to leave Metaltown, Mr. Hinderlans?'

'Not particularly,' replied Hodge.

'Oh, then, I shall be seeing you again before long. Good-morning.'

The trying interview was over, and the two were walking along the street. Dirk looked at his watch and found that he had just time to catch an early train to Applewait.

'It is quicker over than I thought,' he said. 'And I have time after all to be home to-night. The old man seemed gruff, don't you think, Hodge?'

'A trifle that way,' returned Hodge.

'However, it must be all right, since Mr. Moloch received us so well.'

'Yes, I suppose so,' remarked Hodge reflectively.

'No invitation to dinner, though, as I think he might have given us.'

'Yes, I too think he might have gone to that length.'

'However, it is all the better, as it lets me get off the sooner.'

'Yes, that is one advantage, certainly.'

'You 'll let me know if anything turns up, old fellow?'

'Depend on me to do so,' returned Hodge.

'Then, good-bye.'

'Good-bye.'

Dirk caught a passing 'bus, and was off, leaving his companion standing on the pavement looking after him, a regretful expression upon his face.

On through the fresh green flats and hay-fields the train flew at a mile a minute, while Dirk thought it was slower than he had ever travelled before. Through the scenery to

which he had long been a stranger, and yet which he hardly noticed as they went along, for he was thinking upon his prospects. Were they as bright as he had every reason and right to expect?

He was sure of six months' work; of course that had been promised very definitely. But was the man who had sent him out, and for whom he had laboured so incessantly, thoroughly satisfied with his efforts?

Surely he must be, for he had done better than even he expected at the outset—surely, or else he would not have smiled and parted so pleasantly.

But what of Mr. Grabbleson? Did he know the perils Dirk had passed through, and how he had conquered time and space in his service, that he had received him so coldly, without a word of acknowledgment or curiosity on the subject? Surely he must have done so as head of the firm.

Dirk felt disappointed as he thought upon the interview. There are some services which money is not sufficient to remunerate, and his were of this class. He felt that this publisher, no matter how lofty his position in the commercial world may have been, ought to have congratulated him upon his escape from the jaws of death, if he did no more. He felt that his reception had been ungracious and ungrateful in the extreme.

'I suppose it is a question of L. S. D. all along,' he thought; 'and Mr. Grabbleson did not praise me in case he had to pay more than our agreement and the extras I have spent; yes, that must be it.'

Then he turned inwardly to the smiling reception of Mr. Moloch for consolation, but even here he failed to glean much solid comfort; for he remembered that both smile and conversation had been mainly directed towards his companion Hodge, while he came in only for a sort of wintry reflection.

'Bah! what am I making myself wretched about?' he muttered. 'They must require me, for I have all the information about the lands I have gone through. This is my surest hold upon them if sentiment is dead in the nineteenth century amongst business men.'

From his own affairs he got on to think about Stanley, the African explorer, and the way in which he had been

received upon his first return after finding Livingstone, by the geographical societies and the newspapers.

He remembered how the plucky hero describes his feelings on the subject, years afterwards, when they were all bending before him and delighting to honour him.

'I might never have gone again to Africa if they hadn't mocked me so on that first journey,' said the indomitable explorer, his voice husky and trembling with emotion as he spoke. 'But I wanted the dunderheads to acknowledge their fault; that gave me strength and courage—that kept me alive when I was faint and hungry and thirsty. Every word of mockery had bitten into my heart and stayed there—and day after day I sat and smoked and brooded upon it. And I succeeded—I made the stay-at-home cowards eat their dastardly words, but d'ye think I like them now any the better because they fawn upon me and flatter me?'

Dirk felt that the great Grabbleson had allowed the moment to pass when a word of approval would have been like a drink in the desert. After this he would make them acknowledge what they owed to him, but he could never again receive their praises otherwise than as his just due.

He threw his head back with the pride of a man who is conscious of having done his duty whether the boors had been able to acknowledge it or not.

CHAPTER III

THE HAPPY SIDE OF METALTOWN

AT Applewait Dirk Davelock had no reason to complain about his reception; indeed, for half a week he was the hero of the hour.

His father-in-law met him at the station with the children; they had all been able to come, and bring the dog also, who, however, had now become very sedate.

His brother-in-law met him also, two or three stations before Applewait. His father-in-law asked his advice and opinion upon everything, and listened with a deference to his ideas and anecdote. The old lady went so far as to offer him a spare bed at her place where the children would not worry him, and seemed surprised when he laughingly declined her offer, and answered that he would rather sleep at home.

Then about the fourth day he fell once more into his old position, was received with studied and chilled politeness as if he had never been away, and made to feel how short-lived a dream fame is.

The old man always let him know when he was losing his respect by the accent which he put upon his name; when honouring, he pronounced it properly with the accent on the first syllable; when intending to be cutting and severe, he turned it into three instead of two.

Thus, for three days, he was addressed as Mr. Dàvelock, afterwards it became Davélock, and then he knew that he was once more considered of no importance.

This did not trouble him much, however, for he was mostly concerned with the sad alteration in the appearance of his wife, and felt that the sleeping powders were killing her very fast.

He consulted the doctor about this, who said, 'Get her away from this place as soon as possible; the change may do her good, nothing else will.'

So he made up his mind to return at once to Metaltown and prepare a house.

As a feeler, before leaving, he wrote to Messrs. Grabbleson for a portion of his salary, and to his satisfaction received the cheque by return, with compliments. 'If they had any complaint to make, now would be the time to make it. They must be pleased enough, and I was only frightening myself needlessly.'

He did not tell his wife about his reception at head-quarters, as there was no use frightening her about trifles, and she was in too shattered a state to be able to give him any advice. It was with a melancholy feeling of loneliness that he bade her and the children once more a hasty good-bye, and returned to Metaltown. He felt that he had no one to lean upon now, but must face all the responsibilities by himself.

His wife, who had been so brave, self-denying and energetic in the past, now looked helplessly about her, wondering how ever she could undertake the thousand and one duties of a mother, and what task to tackle first. It was pitiful to see it all; and an almost hopeless feeling of despair took possession of him, as he sat back in the train and allowed his pipe to go out, while he thought over it all and the future.

There had been little pleasure in that re-union. How could there be with only that tiny grave to look at, and the catastrophe to talk over. Tears met him at the beginning, or friends who could not understand that tears were the only emotions which he could indulge in with that pathetic white-haired woman to greet him; she whom he had laboured for so passionately, and with this result.

He took the time-table, and studied the map and the table of contents. Where would he settle? for like Apple-wait, their old quarter was too much filled with memories to go there.

Yes, he would try the opposite quarter of the city—the side with its health-giving moors, where on Bank holidays young men and their sweethearts were wont to regale and relax.

House-hunting is about the most obnoxious task a man can set himself to. Dirk for the next few days set himself energetically to work, and at last fixed upon what would just suit; a nice situation close to the moor, drained according to the most modern improved system, and, as the landlord remarked, most select.

Of course he had to pay for all these advantages; in fact, the rent and rates represented a pretty good income, but he did not consider that at the time. It was healthy, so that was the main point to consider for his delicate wife and daughter. He closed without further demur, and set about getting his furniture home, from where it had been stored, without any further delay.

Reader, unless you possess heirlooms which you cannot part with, if ever you have occasion to store up your furniture, I can only give you *Punch's* advice respecting matrimony, which is, 'Don't.' Rather sell off, and purchase a new set upon your return.

Dirk had paid a respectable rent for the storing up of things that were not worth it, and he got them back in a state of wreckage. That is, what he got back; books mildewed and limp, with the backs curled and parting company with the insides; carpets rotten, beds rat-devoured, and chairs disconnected and dangerous to use in any way. It was a reign of rust, mildew, and general decay. He felt that the articles were his through some occult instinct, and because the man assured him upon his honour, as an honest Metaltonian tradesman, that they were his, but that was all. If he had not been so depressed, he would have presented them to the man in lieu of his bill and saved forty per cent. on the transaction in the purchase of new goods, but, as it was, he saw the melancholy records of a year and a half of neglect carted in, paid the account, and sat down to inhale and sneeze over the musty odours.

He almost caved in, until he remembered that Australian march, and then he plucked up spirit once more, determined to prove that he was a man. With the aid of a charwoman and her husband he was able to make a faint show of resistance to fate about the fourth day after taking possession, and appoint the next for the home-coming of his wife and family.

Dirk looked round him sadly on the fifth day. With huge fires he had conquered the damp and got things into order; but never again would he let his heart go out to relics or household gods. The furniture-storing man had completely cured him of all such innocent follies henceforth and for ever. A white-washed barrack and a deal table would content him in the way of decoration. Nevertheless he hung up his savage trophies, which he had brought with him, upon the walls, determined to make the best show he could under the circumstances. At last he was ready for his darlings.

It was now five o'clock, and the train would be in at eight. As he looked round him to see if all was right before feeding the fires once more, he was startled by a knock at the front door, and upon going to open it he found his old friend, Mr. Melgarf, who had come to see his new place.

The first to welcome him to home, the first to step within his new house. Dirk felt while he ushered him in that he was fated never to be free from this friend any more; that he would be still to the fore, and first foot when he drew his last breath. He always came as if with a kindly purpose, yet with cold effect and ill luck.

Dirk showed him his curios, however, and tried to get rid of this feeling, for the ancient one was now all flattery and admiration. Dirk represented success, which he worshipped, in that he had returned safely and seemingly confident as to the future. This house was a finer one than the last one, which also impressed him, therefore Dirk had great difficulty in getting rid of him so as to be in time for the train arrival, for the old man did not feel inclined to budge. However, the time was drawing near and the fires wanted replenishing, therefore, at last, Dirk almost told him to go. Then once more free, he piled on the coals and rushed off to the station to meet the travellers.

He was just in time. Two minutes more and he would have been late. Just in time to see the powerful engine appear round the bend with its two crimson eyes glaring out of the darkness. Then next moment he was watching eagerly at the carriage windows as they passed for the dear faces. Yes, there they were all safely. The dark Spanish-looking mother with her large eyes, drooping lids, and grey hair, like a portrait by Velasquez, the excitement of meeting her

husband lighting it up with a temporary flush and animation. Katie, sedate and watchful, sitting bolt upright like a sentinel on duty, with her mother's umbrella firmly grasped in her little hands. She had sat thus the whole journey, white-faced and vigilant lest anything might have gone wrong if she relaxed in her watch. The two boys were fast asleep in each other's arms. They had had a wild time of it before they were overcome. The eldest sister clutching the basket which contained 'Snodjy,' the white cat, who announced his presence by pathetic mews now and then. 'Dicky,' the starling, was in his wicker-work cage, open-mouthed, and only able in his intense excitement to ejaculate, 'Most extraordinary.'

They were all there, excepting the one they had left behind. 'Tweed,' the dog, dry-nosed and very troubled in his mind about these frequent changes to and fro, and another stranger, a little foxy-looking servant girl whom Mrs. Davelock had brought up from Applewait to help her with the children, thinking that she could trust a country girl better than a town-bred one.

There were bundles and boxes enough to fill a spare cab, so Dirk hired two, and very soon had them on the road home, jolting through the gas-lit streets and crowded shop windows, where the assistants stood shouting out, 'Buy! buy!! buy!!!' to the great amusement of the children, and distraction of the passers. Both cabs being filled with live stock and baggage, Dirk had to take up his position on the box with the driver, who was a merry, red-nosed, blotchy-cheeked fellow, a fair specimen of his class. Dirk and he got on well together as they drove along, with the second vehicle following up behind.

'A good dog that of yours, sir,' observed cabby.

'It is a thoroughbred,' answered Dirk, proud of his animal, which was trotting docilely alongside of the cab. 'He has a long pedigree of prize-takers on both sides.'

'I should say he had from the look of him.'

Soon after this they all arrived, and drew up to the house, where, after Dirk had got them safely landed and inside, in the ebullition of his heart, and according to his usual habit, he insisted on the Jehus drinking a parting glass; and to show them that he was not the least bit haughty, poured out

a little for himself at the same time, a ceremony to which they had not the slightest objection to repeat had he been so inclined.

'Here's to ye, sir, and yer darg.'

'Thanks,' said Dirk, touching glasses.

'A splendid darg, sir, and worth a pot o' money, I should say,' observed the second cabman, winking solemnly towards his companion, as he buried his ruby-tinted nose inside his glass.

'I wouldn't sell him for fifty pounds.'

'I would say not, sir—a good darg.'

And so these worthy masters of the reins took their departure; while two days afterwards, the faithful 'Tweed,' who had followed their fortunes so long and endured so much, was lost. Dirk had boasted a little too much about their only friend to be able to keep him in honest Metaltown.

CHAPTER IV

A RUDE AWAKENING, AND A BUSINESS CONVERSATION

YES, 'Tweed' had gone, and seemingly for ever, his fate shrouded in the most profound mystery. They advertised for him without success, although many dog-fanciers brought quadrupeds of all kinds for their inspection. They gave it into the hands of the police with no better luck; went to the house of detention for stray dogs, and saw many pairs of pathetic hungry eyes looking from the barred cages along which they passed, for lost masters and mistresses, but no 'Tweed.'

'He has been shipped abroad, you may depend upon it, sir,' said the inspector; so with miserable hearts they had to return and mourn for another vacancy.

Dirk being now ready and eager for work, wrote to Mr. Moloch to apprise him of the fact, to which the art-editor returned a short note, informing him that he would let him know as soon as they were ready to go on, therefore he had just to content himself with waiting as patiently as he could for further orders.

Thus two months went by without further signs from head-quarters, excepting an official notice that a packet of glass negatives had arrived for him from Australia, and asking if they should be forwarded to him.

As these were photographs which Dirk had taken of the natives, and which he had left at Melbourne to be developed, he returned an answer telling Mr. Moloch what they were, asking him to look them over and pick out those that were of use to the firm before returning them.

A weary time of inactivity and waiting; for, as he expected orders by each post, he could not occupy himself with any

other task, his mind being all engrossed on the one work, and feeling himself bound still to the service of Messrs. Grabbleson and Co.

A miserable two months of suspense, with that weekly visitor, Mr. Melgarf, always turning up to time, and cross-examining him about the business, with that chill and doubtful persistency which left Dirk always with a cloud of uneasiness as to the probable cause of this delay.

For a week or two he answered airily enough, but as the time rolled on, the stereotyped replies grew forced, and the cold questions more pointed and insulting. Clearly Mr. Melgarf was losing his respect once more, and showing it, until those exactly timed visits became again the nerve-racks which they had been before.

Another matter also tended to trouble his serenity. Hodge Hinderlans not having as yet fixed upon a studio, had asked Dirk to receive letters and parcels for him, and now they were coming pretty often, letters with the Grabbleson trade stamp upon them, and small, square parcels which, from the weight and size, Dirk felt to be wood blocks. Still Hodge did not make any explanation about them when he called and took them away, and Dirk dismissed the suspicions which were growing up, with the thought that they must be some old work Hodge was finishing; at the same time wishing that they would think a little upon him also.

One day, however, he got a surprise. A clerk at the office, through some oversight, had placed his name upon a letter instead of writing 'care of,' so thinking that at last his order had come, he opened the letter, to find instructions to Mr. Hinderlans about the correcting of a block which was then being forwarded.

The blow had fallen abruptly. They were going on rapidly with the work without consulting him in any way, and Hodge had been working all the time, using him as a post-office, and keeping him in utter ignorance of what was going on.

Dirk stood for a moment dazed, then woke up with a savage howl of rage and indignation at the unworthy treachery practised upon him. If he hadn't pleased, why didn't they tell him so like men, and have done with it, and not have

gone on fooling him for two long months. Why let him launch into this expense of a dear house which had frittered his money almost all away?

He felt bitter with his companion for not warning him in time, but more so at the man who had sent him out, and whom he had idolised and risked his life for a dozen times. This Moloch who had seemed so kind and true; before whose fiery shrine one of his children had already passed; for whom the mother had grown grey and old before her time.

That night Mr. Melgarf came with his usual list of questions, to which Dirk replied with his usual evasions, feeling hot-eyed and heavy hearted as he sat before him and emptied pipe after pipe furiously.

Hodge also called while the old man was in, to whom Dirk handed his packet and letter. He dare not question him before this icy tormentor, so he merely explained the mistake in the address which had made him open it, but he knew as he looked at Hodge's sullen eye, that he had been aware of the duplicity all along.

When his company had left, which they did together, he sat down and wrote to the art editor demanding an explanation of the long delay, determined to force his hand and get at his intentions, feeling that anything was better than longer uncertainty.

Next day the reply came. Mr. Moloch felt annoyed at his presumption and wrote him an insulting and sneering note, telling him that possibly he might be impatient, but that there were more matters than his convenience to study in this business.

Enough; Dirk was wide-awake now, with all the romantic flimsy veils torn from his eyes, rudely but effectually. He was not to be tossed aside like an old glove now that Moloch thought he was done with him.

Another night of tempestuous passion, during which he tramped his room without sleep; all the year and a half of gratitude turned into savage hatred, self-contempt, and despair, for he had placed his all upon this cast and had lost it.

Had he failed in his work?—No; the task had been almost beyond the power of mortal man, but he had done it, and, as

he felt, done it well. Given more than he had promised; spared neither body nor mind; acted with loyalty and faith towards this man who was kicking him out with less ceremony than he would have kicked out a stray mongrel dog.

He reviewed the position all through that long night: picture by picture which he had done rose up before him one by one, which he mentally criticised as they passed by in ghostly rotation, as if they had been the work of another man, while a band like iron clasped tightly round his burning brain.

With that stern past, came the pitiless future spreading out before him. His money was almost done. His name compromised if they now rejected him. An instinct told him that they would forget all their word promises, dispute perhaps the extra expenses which he had incurred; perhaps this was the reason why they were casting him off now, to save that paltry extra money. As he lashed himself up to blind fury, he could not think too meanly of them, nor of the paltry man whom he had trusted so utterly and blindly.

At last morning came, and with a hasty wash he prepared himself for the coming and decisive interview.

'I wish to see Mr. Moloch,' he said abruptly to the office-boy, who did not dare to snigger at that dark, stern face, but took in the card abjectly and returned almost immediately, saying:—'Mr. Moloch is in, and will see you; come this way.'

Into the sanctum once more Dirk stalked, past the boy and straight up to where the little great man stood waiting for him, pallid with fear, and with his fingers playing about the row of electric ivory knobs. He evidently expected a scene of violence, and was prepared to summon help if necessary. Dirk smiled grimly as he noticed these preparations of the little craven cad.

'Good morning, Mr. Davelock.'

'Good morning, Mr. Moloch,' answered Dirk brusquely, ignoring the feeble, shaking hand which was half stretched out to him, upon which Mr. Moloch once more sought the electric knobs.

'You don't need to be afraid, Mr. Moloch, I have only come for an explanation of your insulting note of yesterday, not to hurt you.'

Mr. Moloch breathed once more and slid into his chair, motioning Dirk to take another; who, however, stood upright waiting on the other's reply.

A pause of a few seconds, during which Dirk looked down steadfastly upon the man whom he had trusted, while the other licked his dry lips with his dry tongue, then plucking up some of his usual pert arrogance, he opened the battle.

'I really do not see why I need explain anything to you; I consider that you have failed to satisfy me with your work, and that is enough, surely.'

'No, Mr. Moloch, it is not enough for me. I want to know in what I have failed, and why I have been kept for two months in idleness and uncertainty.'

'Surely you do not wish me to be more explicit, do you, Mr. Davelock?'

'Yes, sir, I do—how have I failed? In quantity?'

'Oh, dear no, you gave us *quantity*, and to spare——' Mr. Moloch was growing daring, and could now smile sarcastically, seeing that Dirk took it so quietly.

'Well, then, is it in *quality* that I have not pleased *you*?'

'That is it, Mr. Davelock. Now, really, my good fellow, don't place me in such a painful position as to have to point out your faults,'—Mr. Moloch was protesting with an affectation of high-bred sufferance.

'I am sorry to place you in such a painful position, Mr. Moloch, but my reputation demands that you should give me a fuller explanation.'

'Your *reputation*?' contemptuously.

'Yes, sir, my reputation!'

Dirk spoke very quietly, but very distinctly.

'Sir,' said Mr. Moloch suddenly. 'I will show you something'—he opened his desk as he spoke—'some letters which I have received from Australia, wondering that we could send out such an incompetent *person* as you.'

'Private letters, I presume?' observed Dirk softly.

'Yes, sir.'

'Possibly from a woman?'

'Yes, it is a lady who writes.'

'Ah! I thought so.'

While Mr. Moloch was rummaging in his desk for the proofs of this ridiculous charge, Dirk thought rapidly over all

the women he had met in his travels, and whom he might have offended unconsciously. Yes, he remembered one on board the steamer, who had been his *vis-à-vis* at dinner, and who had unaccountably taken a dislike to him and shown it by insulting him in every possible way; he had thought nothing of this at the time, but it now started up to him quite vividly.

'Here are the letters,' remarked Mr. Moloch, looking up. 'But, ah!—it is better not to show you them, it may hurt your feelings.'

'Nothing anonymous can hurt my feelings—you have not spared them; there is no use now trying to do so, Mr. Moloch. Show them to me, please.'

'No, it is useless to do so at present.' And Mr. Moloch shut the desk with a bang.

'I suppose you have these ridiculous letters from a spiteful woman; but, as you say, they are useless, and ought not to affect me in my business relations with your firm.'

'They are from an influential person, else we might not have heeded them.'

'But I have also considerable colonial influence in my favour, to set against these paltry stings. You must have seen some of the public notices which I received all through the colonies.'

'Ha! there you are,' retorted Mr. Moloch, with a sudden baring of his teeth, and a snarl of hatred in his voice. 'We did see them, and they did you no good with us, I can assure you.'

'Were they not in praise of your projected work?'

'Yes, one for Grabbleson and Co., and two for Dirk Davelock—oh, you thought that you managed that nicely, didn't you?'

Mr. Moloch was becoming excited, and letting out more than he intended of his hatred and jealousy; but Dirk drew himself up proudly and answered calmly:—

'No, sir, I didn't try to manage anything for Dirk Davelock, more fool that I was not to do so. I went at the request of your agent to try to get hold of those editors which he could not, in your service, and confined myself strictly to praising the firm which I represented, as the editors can testify to a man. If they liked me personally, and mentioned me in connection with my work, it was not, in a single

instance, at my hinting or request, but at their own option and freewill——'

'I know—oh, I know——'

'No, sir, you cannot know what I have done and endured for you, or you would not dare to treat me as you are doing. What I have gone through abroad and what I have lost at home——'

Dirk paused chokingly, overcome by his emotions, while Mr. Moloch took up the conversation briskly and unfeelingly.

'Oh, yes, I know all about that. You lost a daughter, or something of that kind, I believe——'

'Yes,' gasped Dirk huskily.

'Yes, I heard about it, or read about it somewhere. Very sudden; but that's nothing to do with me. Other people lose sons and daughters as well as you.'

'Have you ever done so?'

'Certainly not; but you are wandering from your question. I have no business with your private afflictions or domestic losses.'

'You are right there,' replied Dirk coldly, picking himself together quickly, and looking at the little callous monster with contempt. 'Let us stick to business; my drawings are the point we have to discuss.'

'Yes! and they are, without exception, beastly—not one of them that we can use or what a schoolboy could not have done better.'

'That is your verdict only—a very late verdict, indeed, Mr. Moloch. Please to show me my drawings, and point out what you consider to be defects.'

'Well, if you insist upon humbling yourself, I will.'

'Justifying myself, sir, not humbling.'

Mr. Moloch shrugged his narrow shoulders, and touched one of the bell-knobs, which brought the office-boy promptly inside, to whom Mr. Moloch gave some whispered directions.

'Yes, sir.'

The boy disappeared, and Mr. Moloch sat drumming the desk with his finger-points, while Dirk looked at him fixedly, thinking, 'What a wretched little cur I set up to be a god. What an incurable fool I am, to be sure.'

The boy here entered with three or four sketches in his

hand, which he laid before Mr. Moloch, and beat a hasty retreat. As Dirk looked on the drawings lying topmost, face upwards, he recognised one of the most rapid and hasty sketches he had done, and which he had intended merely to be a rough idea for future work, such as Mr. Moloch had asked him to make before leaving. He saw in a moment the trap which had been prepared for him from the beginning, and felt no longer astonished.

'Look at this drawing, for an example of what I mean,' remarked Mr. Moloch serenely. 'Observe the haste all through it. I am sure that you could not have taken longer than a couple of hours over this sketch.'

Dirk looked at it quietly, and replied: 'I rode thirty miles to get that sketch, and took exactly five minutes to do it in, as I timed myself.'

'Then you see I am right; you knocked it off anyhow.'

'Yes, I dashed it off, but not anyhow. I had a bush fire after me, so could not wait longer, or I would not have been here to be condemned.'

'Ah, indeed; but I, in my capacity of art editor, fail to recognise any excuse for haste in art.'

'No, perhaps you do not, sitting at your desk here in Metaltown; you fail to recognise that. But if you had been with me at the time, I fancy somehow that you would have done so; still, as far as it is carried, what *schoolboy* fault do you find with it?'

'As far as it is carried, it is well enough; but, my dear sir, it isn't carried far enough.'

The art critic had made a good hit, and gently grinned over his little joke.

'Show me the next,' said Dirk gruffly.

'There, and there, and there.'

He tossed them over as one might do a bad hand of cards, while Dirk looked tenderly for a moment at the half-dozen rapid specimens, each of which recalled a moment when delay meant death.

'You see none of these could we use *as they are*.'

'No,' remarked Dirk quietly, 'I did not mean them to be so used. I think you will see from my notes on the back of each of these that they were intended to be worked up by me after my return.'

'I never read notes, I leave that to the literary editor; I only look at, and judge the drawings as they are, and as an artist.'

This last Mr. Moloch uttered in the lofty tone art judges generally adopt on pictures, if they paint a *little* themselves. 'These are only a few out of many I could point out, and which are totally useless to us in any way.'

'Would you kindly show me a few of the others—some of the many full-page drawings which I made when I had a little leisure at my command, Mr. Moloch; any of the full pages will do.'

'What's the good, have *I* not said they are all bad?'

'Yes, but you have not yet proved it—you say all are bad; what about my drawings of Mount Owen Stanley, for instance?'

'Ah, I dare say we may be able to utilise a few of the most careful ones by using them as suggestions to some other artist.'

Dirk felt it was vain to urge his cause longer with this tiny tyrant; it was like beating his head against a dead wall.

'Is your verdict the final one with the firm, Mr. Moloch?'

'Yes, on the sketches; the only one you are likely to get.'

'And on my literary matter?'

'That is out of my department completely; but I have no doubt you will find yourself in an equal fix there also; in fact, I fear we have wasted our money entirely upon you.'

'Ah!' Dirk drew a long breath and tried frantically to keep his hands down, still they were twitching to be at the little man.

'Then I suppose that I may consider myself dismissed from the service of Messrs. Grabbleson and Co.?'

'You may—if you had come to me this morning in a proper spirit, for the sake of your family I might have tried you with something, but now——'

'Thanks, Mr. Moloch.' Dirk's eyes were blazing now, and his voice ringing out; 'I would not work for you now, even if starvation lay before me.'

'Which it probably will,' murmured Mr. Moloch.

'No, sir. I have not yet wasted all my strength in your service, and I may be able to carry a hod before that time

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comes; better that billet, a thousandfold, than another job from you.'

'You think so now, perhaps.'

'I shall always think so—always; but one thing I would like, if I only could afford it, before I go.'

'What is that, Mr. Davelock?'

'To enjoy half an hour at kicking your wretched little carcass round this room.'

Mr. Moloch sprang up suddenly with alarm, overturning his armchair as he made for the bell-knobs.

'But don't be afraid, Mr. Moloch, I won't touch you to-day. I can't afford it, more is the pity.'

And Dirk turned with this despondent farewell, and strode from the sanctum.

'Phew, but it has been a warm half-hour!' muttered Mr. Moloch, as he mopped his moist forehead with his handkerchief. 'But I am done with the fool now, I think, so he can go and get hanged.'

CHAPTER V

FIGHTING THE WIND

IT was all over with his brilliant dreams and aspirations. Dirk felt this as he turned his back on the sanctum and walked swiftly, with head held high, through the outer office, down the stairs, and into the crowded street, where it seemed as if the eyes of each passer-by were fixed upon him with a mocking consciousness of his defeat.

The book, *his* book, which he had planned out from the beginning, and laboured so hard to make a success, would be completed now without him, and without his name being in it. The Australians would conclude that he had been a fraud when it appeared, and he would be held up to open scorn, and through Metaltown as well. The pluck was completely out of him, although he held his head up, and he felt that he must hide himself somewhere away from those countless hard and mocking eyes.

He entered a public-house and called for a pint of stout, which he drank down almost at one gulp, and then turned to get the dose repeated. How could he go home with his bitter news and face that nerve-shattered woman whom he had dragged up from the country to share his miserable fate? Where could he go to for comfort or advice?

Mr. Melgarf would mock at him. He did know one or two men in town, but they were in the same line of business as himself, and he felt that they would only pretend to sympathise with him; but in reality would straightway go and curry favour with the mighty autocrat on purpose to get some of the crumbs which he had lost.

It was well that he took stout instead of spirits, as the one deadened the pain a little, while the other would only have maddened him.

By and by he got a little calmer, and even a little hopeful. He would go home and write a private letter to the supreme head of the firm, and, stating his case, ask for an interview. Surely self-interest would move the chief to listen to him in spite of Mr. Moloch; at any rate, he would try. So finishing the second pint, he filled and lit his pipe and took his way back to the station.

When he reached home he broke the miserable result of his visit as gently as he could to his wife. It was necessary that she should know about it, for now they must together face the stern future. Their present house would have to be given up without delay, and a smaller one taken somewhere, so that they could hide their heads for a while.

The task was not so hard a one as he had supposed, for Mrs. Davelock, with that keen instinct which serves the sex with a sense more than is possessed by man, had been prepared for it, and she came up nobly to the sacrifice.

'Let us take a smaller house, Dirk, somewhere in the country, while we have some money left, and then we will be able to think it all out; besides, Katie will be the better of the change.'

They shut themselves into the bedroom to discuss these matters, and spoke in a whisper, for now that they had this little servant in the house, they could no longer speak out as they had been used to do. Already the little maid divined the misery which they both tried to conceal, and seemed to sniff in the coming poverty with scornful delight.

They had brought this girl from the country and tried to make her feel like one of themselves; but that did not matter. Servants of the nineteenth century are the natural enemies of their employers, whether bred in the town or in the country, and this little one was no exception to the rule. When money is plentiful and luxury prevails, the employer does not find these truths out; it is only when things begin to grow scarce and economy has to be practised that the servant becomes the spy and insolent tyrant to her master and mistress.

This small servant Mrs. Davelock had brought with her out of disinterested kindness, for she was of little help, her mistress keeping her more from sentiment than use. She had the same advantages as the other children. Neither by day nor night had she been separated from the others, for her

mistress thought she might feel strange and lonely, as she herself felt in this strange place. Of course this treatment was all a mistake on the part of Mrs. Davelock, and as many of the modern social reformers would say, very injurious to the girl as a servant. She ought to have been kept to her kitchen by day, instead of eating with the family, so as to make her respectful; had the garret to sleep in, without attention paid to her fear of ghosts; and as much work taken, as could be driven out of her, so as to make her contented with her humble lot in life, instead of being coaxed and bribed to do anything, or flattered afterwards.

But poor Mrs. Davelock could not manage as prudent housewives do with their maids, who wish to keep their respect. She could never forget that the girl was motherless, and like as her own daughters might have been had they been left orphans. So she was extra kind, pitied her, and clothed her, besides giving her lessons at nights and paying her the wage of a full-grown woman. And she had her reward here as they had hitherto had it elsewhere, by reaping a harvest of ingratitude and hatred in return for her sowing of indiscriminate kindness.

Rebecca was foxy-haired and foxy-eyed, and finding herself treated like a daughter, became a very insolent daughter indeed. She pried about the house, opening drawers, reading letters, and listening at doors, so that even their bedroom was not sacred from her. Another faculty the little one developed shortly after she arrived, which was to find articles, particularly money. She was always finding money, while Dirk was as often losing it. At first it was coppers, then it became silver. These finds she kept to herself and spent in sweets, for, like all her kind, she was a veritable glutton for sugar and sweetmeat, and although free to eat what and when she pleased, yet she never was content. As they grew more anxious and depressed, she went about sullen and discontented, trying her utmost to waste what she could not use.

'We must send Rebecca back again,' said Mrs. Davelock, 'and be ourselves once more, for oh! I am tired of being watched by strangers.'

'And lose our address from Mr. Melgarf, so that we may be free from these awful weekly visits.'

So in a little while they almost grew cheerful in the thought

of a little workman's cottage free from servants, friends, dignity, and the fearful expenses of rent, rates, and taxes.

They felt that they had been out of their element in this dull respectable locality, surrounded as they were on all sides by people who starved themselves to keep up two or three servants, and who had eyed them with suspicion and open contempt. Rebecca also felt an outcast, with her country dialect, which made those smart-tongued, pampered, and town-bred hirelings mock at her every time she went into the back green, so that she felt she belonged to a despised and rejected family of poor white people, and showed her hatred in every way she could show it. The landlord, who lived a little higher up the street and passed daily to and from his city office, looked at the windows with grave doubt every time he passed, as if he was wondering how his next quarter's rent was to be paid, and regretting that he had lowered the dignity of his house by letting it to people who could only keep one small maid, and who committed the unpardonable social crime of treating her like an equal.

In this street it was not considered proper to walk on the moor during a holiday, while the East End crowd were enjoying themselves, and Dirk had early compromised himself in the eyes of his neighbours by taking all the family to see the fun. He did not repeat the offence, not for the sake of the neighbours, but because the fun which he did see on that first visit did not seem the kind of merry sport he cared his wife or children to look at or join in. It was not the least degree like festive gatherings which he had witnessed in other countries, and although the happy Metaltownites seemed all happy enough to be sure, yet it was a trifle too unconventional for modesty to enjoy. Still, that he had gone once had been enough to put them all into Coventry, if their lack of servants had not done so already. During their two months' stay in this highly respectable street they had only been spoken at, never to, therefore they did not regard the thought of leaving it with any regret.

That night Dirk sat down and wrote a carefully worded letter to Mr. Grabbleson, asking for an interview, so that he might justify himself in his eyes.

Mrs. Davelock also told Rebecca that they would not be able to keep her any longer than another month—a

communication which the maid received with a sullen and resentful air.

Two days after the reply came, not from Mr. Grabbleson, but from a clerk, referring him to Mr. Moloch for any satisfaction which he might desire. Again he wrote with the same result; he could not get past the art editor.

Then he wrote to the literary editor, whose name he did not know; an answer came which both astonished and consoled Dirk, making him feel that at least there was one kindly heart in this vast establishment. This *gentleman* wrote telling him that he was quite satisfied with his work and would be sending him 'proofs' presently, also expressing his sincere sympathy with him for the abominable treatment which he had received; at the same time adding that it was utterly beyond his power to aid him in any way.

It was one gleam of light through the darkness which now enveloped him, and which gathered day by day more heavily upon him, paralysing his brain and hand. He could not work, but only sat day after day brooding on his defeat, with that fearsome depression upon him and that iron band round his brain, alternated with gusts of ferocity and passion which made him unaccountable for his words.

The old man came as usual week by week; indeed, he was now coming more frequently, for he was curious to hear the news, so made a Sunday visit as well as a week-day one, probing the unfortunate man until he was nearly mad.

Dirk tried to guard his miserable secret as long as possible, but he could not deceive the astute 'Ancient'; therefore one Sunday afternoon he blurted out the whole of his wrongs, not that he expected any sympathy or aid, but because he was sick of any further duplicity.

That morning he had discovered one of his last three five-pound notes missing; he had kept them in an unlocked desk, and this last straw had exhausted his patience.

Rebecca's quarter was nearly up, and she was to go home the next week; of late she had been going about with an extra revengeful air—was this her revenge?

Mr. Melgarf listened to the tale of woe with a stolid, grave face, but without expressing any astonishment. When Dirk was done, he filled his pipe leisurely, lit it, and puffed in silence for some moments.

'A bad job altogether,' at length he said solemnly.

'But what do you think about it—have I not a right to complain?'

'Well, you see, it is a big firm, and I must say you were foolish to quarrel with your bread and butter.'

'But I did not quarrel, Mr. Melgarf,' broke in Dirk.

'Ah'—he went on puffing.

'I shall have to see my friend, who recommended you, and explain the matter to him.'

'I wish you would put me right with him, Mr. Melgarf.'

'I'll do my best,' said Mr. Melgarf; and, rising up, he put up his pipe, and began to pull on his coat and button it carefully over his breast.

That was all the consolation Dirk could get from him, as he left the house, and showed his back to them. It seemed to say, 'I am now leaving you to your fate—which you richly deserve for being unsuccessful.'

He came again on the Wednesday afterwards to tell Dirk that he had seen his friend.

'And you explained how Mr. Moloch had treated me, did you?' asked Dirk eagerly.

'Well, I did not go into particulars. I told him that they had some kind of a grievance against you, but that he would hear it for himself either from you, or Mr. Moloch.'

Dirk sank back into his seat and said no more. What was there to say in the face of this? He was condemned and sentenced.

The next day Rebecca left them, Mrs. Davelock had appealed to her pity, told her what that five pounds meant to them at that moment, and tried in every way to touch her conscience. But the girl kept an obstinate sullen silence and went on her way without confessing the theft, and they could not find it in their hearts to brand her publicly as a thief. Dirk took her to the station, paid her fare and made her comfortable for the journey—his own trouble was too mighty for any petty resentment.

CHAPTER VI

OUT OF DOUBTING CASTLE

ONE morning the packet of photographic negatives came to hand. Dirk was in one of his savage states when they arrived; so, without looking at them, he took a hammer, smashed them to pieces, and flung them into the ash-pit. He did not wish to keep a token of his journey beside him

He had written for the remainder of his salary, and received it less the extra expenses which he had spent. They were evidently determined to adhere to their bond and no more.

He also saw Hodge sometimes, but not often. As he explained, Dirk's quarrel with Mr. Moloch had been to his advantage, as he was now extra busy, for they were pushing on the book, as they wanted to have it ready for Christmas. But he went into no details, and Dirk did not ask for any, he was too demoralised and low-spirited for curiosity.

All day long he sat and smoked, with despair in his heart, his brains on fire, a terrible compression which nothing could relieve excepting beer. He drank pint after pint, without being able to quench his fiery thirst, and only when thoroughly stupefied did he feel that band loosen, or that haunting horror of starvation leave him.

'Rouse up, old chap, and do something,' said Hodge, who felt sorry to see him losing himself, now that he was no longer a rival. 'Grabbleson is not the only firm in Metaltown, nor Moloch the only art editor.'

But Dirk looked at him with a bloodshot glare, and shook his head despondently.

'I can't feel as if I could do anything any more that would please any one.'

He found that he had now enough money to satisfy the

landlord, and a little left to keep them for a few weeks in their new house, which they had taken in a little village called Pearstone, a short distance from Metaltown; so he set about packing up and once more removing.

They had fixed upon Pearstone by chance—through looking at *Dalton's Weekly*, seeing there that the rent was cheap and no taxes.

Before he left Metaltown, however, he had one letter from Mr. Moloch, demanding the negatives back again. It appears that they had been sent by mistake, and before the little monster had used them.

Then a savage glow of satisfaction warmed up Dirk's heart, when he felt that through Moloch's stupidity they were now beyond recall. He had thought they were done with them after keeping them for two and a half months.

It was the first pleasure Dirk had felt since his return, to tell that he had destroyed them as useless, and it became intensified when in Mr. Moloch's next letter he saw how furious he was over the loss.

Not much of a pleasure to set against the horrible torture this little evil genius had caused him. Yet, because it was his only grain of comfort, he rolled it about his mouth with a lingering relish, which was pathetic in one naturally so free from narrowness or spite; at least, he had spoilt something which the monster valued and had stupidly let slip through his weak hands.

There were many letters passed between them on this matter, cajoling, doubting, threatening, and insulting. Dirk had no right to destroy the property of Messrs. Grabbleson; to which Dirk replied, that as his expenses had been ignored, their solemn promises of the future six months' broken, and the negatives cast back upon his hands, he did not consider them any longer the property of a firm who could so dishonour itself and him. Then Mr. Moloch told him that not only were the negatives his property, but that everything he had seen during his journeys while in their service were their copyright also. Everything! The little man wound up this precious nineteenth-century epistle and claim of ownership by threatening him with legal proceedings, if he ever dared to sell any work to any other house, about Australia, either artistic or literary.

This letter did more good to Dirk than even a gallon of beer would have done, in the loosening of that brain-band. From it he knew that Mr. Moloch did not consider his work useless, else he would not have considered it worth while to prohibit him. Hodge was right; it was almost time for him to throw aside his shackles and rouse up to work. This letter proved to him that there were more firms than one in Metaltown to whom his experience might be of service. The fact being that Mr. Moloch was getting into hot water. He had tossed aside his tool before he could quite afford to do so. The negatives had been returned to Dirk in a fit of spleen, and at a moment when the art editor thought he had secured the work of another man; for he had resolved, in his vindictiveness, rather to spend more of the firm's cash than that anything of Dirk's should appear. He intended to crush him utterly while about it.

However, this negotiation had somehow fallen through, and the explorer had taken his sketches and notes to another and more fair-dealing establishment. Dirk, who sometime afterwards met this explorer, heard all about it from him. The firm was now at a standstill. Mr. Moloch must either eat humble pie, and cajole Dirk back again, or else try to frighten him into submission by the vague threat of law. The bullying game came the most natural to Mr. Moloch's arrogant and tyrannical nature, so he tried that first.

Dirk was equal to the emergency. He replied smoothly, saying that although the negatives were destroyed, still that he could supply them with material of what they wanted on condition that they would give him a written guarantee that what was used would be acknowledged fully. Also, his past expenses paid up, and the six months' constant work which had been promised to him gone on with, according to the original arrangement, otherwise he would consider himself at liberty to take it elsewhere.

The reply to this was a formal legal intimation from the solicitor of the firm, threatening him with instant proceedings if he did not at once send in all notes, sketches, and memoranda to the firm which he may have taken of his travels, along with a written bond to the effect that he would bind himself to do nothing, at any time, on the subject.

'Will Messrs. Grabbleson and Co. bind themselves to take

from me and *pay* me for what I may write or sketch of Australia in the future?' wrote Dirk to the solicitor.

'Messrs. Grabbleson will not bind themselves to any conditions with Mr. Davelock, but demand from him an instant reply to their last letter,' replied the lawyer promptly.

Dirk, in answer to this, tore the legal document in four portions, writing on the blank quarter page of it. 'Take what proceedings you think right; I hold myself at perfect liberty to do what I think best with my own ideas and experience.' Then he set about preparing for his removal with a lighter heart and a new purpose. His enemies had shown him how best he could now revenge himself upon them for their gross injustice, and right himself in the eyes of the public. Yes, he would set to work with a will, and do exactly what they had tried to force him not to do. He had burst open the dungeon of Giant Despair, and once more breathed the blessed air of Hope.

CHAPTER VII

PEARSTONE IN THE MUD

PEARSTONE, the village to which they now went for rest, was not by any means a picturesque place, although lying not far from many quaint old villages. It had been an upstart from the vicinity of a station, where speculation rushed up flimsy buildings for sale, and cheapness. Houses of all sizes, from the workman's cottages to the shoddy villas, so much affected by city clerks, were built upon a low-lying clay soil without the slightest regard to sanitary conditions.

For about eight months in the year it was a slushy swamp, where pedestrians sank up to the knees in mud, which clung to the feet and legs like glue, and could hardly be brushed away. As the natives remarked, 'Only a *hidiot* would think of cleaning boots in Pearstone.'

The remaining four months out of the twelve this clay soil looked like a cracked and baked brickyard, with great fissures opening everywhere, and the ground as hard as iron. There were gardens to the houses, but nothing grew in them, nor could any one dig them up. In the moist season the spade brought up the soil in great clumps, while in the dry times no pickaxe could move it.

It was an upstart of a village, and a blot upon an otherwise fair country; despised and hated by all the older villagers round, who treated it, as old country people generally treat strangers, with suspicion and coldness; a perfect Nazareth amongst villages. It had no rights either for the living or the dead. No graveyard to bury their dead in; they had to beg permission from one of the others when a death took place, and pay extra for the privilege of shovelling the discarded body underground.

The natives were ignorant, boorish, and dishonest; surly

and ill-conditioned with each other, and living, as best they could, by all sorts of exorbitant and underhand ways. They belonged to no country nor place, only Pearstone, and had no patriotic aspirations—hating every one as they were hated.

Emotionless to either charity, religion, or friendship, nothing could move them except ill-will. A neighbour's affliction or poverty made them rejoice. In fact, they were like the soil from which they were bred, and which racked their bodies with rheumatics; disjointed, hard-hearted, and intractable.

Of course the Davelocks didn't know all this when they took their abode here, or else they would not have come. Katie, the invalid, had just recovered somewhat from another attack of her mysterious trouble before they left Metaltown, and the doctor, which they had there, said that she might be removed with care. Mrs. Davelock, also, was too wearied, when she went with Dirk to see the place, to care to look much about her; besides the landlady was a quiet-looking, soft-speaking, little woman, who praised the locality for being one of the most healthy in the country, while as for the water, she assured them, that was a perfect medicine. Therefore, they concluded to take it straight away, and left, promising to come down again at night and see her husband when he got home from the city, and settle all preliminaries. It had been fair weather for the past two months, and the roadways looked all dry and clean walking; it would do.

'Our tenants are all poor, but honest and kind with one another,' remarked the little landlady on parting.

'That is exactly what we want,' answered Dirk, so they went home content.

That night Dirk saw the landlord, also a quiet-looking, white-faced young man, who said he would call with the papers next day upon them. He looked as if he did not quite credit Dirk's living in this fashionable part of Metaltown, and wanting to come down to a workman's cottage; however, Dirk left quite willing that he should see all was square and right.

'I wish to curtail my expenses and get the country air, free from smoke and fogs for the sake of my family,' explained Dirk.

'Oh, this is quite free of smoke or fogs, and considered very healthy, particularly for invalids,' answered Mr. Wilkings

calmly. He was not a demonstrative man, but he looked honest, and Dirk felt content.

The next afternoon he called upon them again, and after looking round the room like a broker making a valuation, remarked that he was sorry the cottage which they had looked at was let; however, they might have his one if they cared to go on the purchase system.

'But why didn't you tell me that yesterday when I called?' asked Dirk.

Mr. Wilkings shuffled a while, and then mumbled that he had not been quite sure of the tenant.

Dirk had experienced enough by this time to feel that he need not expect any favour, stranger as he was in business, so he merely asked what the purchase system was.

Then Mr. Wilkings explained and showed how simple it all was. In fact, the buyer could purchase the house at the end of a number of years by paying even a less sum than the rent. Of course, rates and taxes over and above, which were merely nominal. 'You see,' he concluded, 'it is your own house from the day you enter on this system, with no one to interfere with you.'

'That sounds all right,' mused Dirk. 'But what if I don't like it after I have bought it?'

'Ah, in that case, at the end of a twelvemonth, if you wish to part with it, we shall take it off your hands again.'

'Well, I don't see why I shouldn't take it upon these conditions.'

Thus, after a few more explanations and replies, the bargain was concluded, and Dirk had become a Pearstone landlord.

They planned their exodus to take place between two of Mr. Melgarf's visits, so that they began their packing-up on the morning after his last visit, happy as they sat and listened to his icy remarks, that this would be the last cold water night-bath to which they would be subjected to. They did not whisper a word of their destination or intentions to him, but sat with such equanimity all through his long visit, that the old man almost feared that they had made up their difference with Grabbleson, or had some other good news, which they were keeping dark from him, and went away quite depressed, and stooping upon his stick. That night their white tom-cat, 'Snodjy,' wiped off the evil influence from their

lintels for the last time, as he had done each time the old man came; this grim and frozen shadow darkened their path no more for a time.

As Dirk could never do the shabby thing with any one, he posted a note on the day they left, asking the old man to address his letters in future to his club. The ancient wrote once or twice making appointments, which Dirk prudently evaded. Once during these months he saw him again in the streets, as Dirk was rushing along seeking work. He almost ran up against Mr. Melgarf, who was leaning against a lamp-post, frail-looking, dejected, and alone; he evidently had had no one to depress nor suck the vitality out of for some time, for he had lost his jaunty appearance although still dressed *à la mode*, and looked at last his full age.

For a moment Dirk felt a thrill of pity for the dejection of the aged one, and, indeed, had put out his hand to touch him; when he suddenly remembered his own hour of dejection and unpitied misery, and drew back softly. 'Bah, why should I let him batten again upon me?' thought Dirk, as he plunged amongst the crowd. 'If ever I succeed he will find me out quickly enough.'

The removing men had come at nightfall, and by early morning were all ready for the journey, which they calculated would take them about four hours, so that by nine o'clock, Dirk and the family delivered up the key to the landlord, who sighed with relief at getting rid of such objectionable tenants; then without one good-bye, they took their departure. For the first time 'Dicky,' the starling, and 'Snodjy,' the cat, did not go with them, but as the men assured them that they would take great care of them on the journey, and as they had a number of changes to make on the way, Dirk felt that the children would be quite enough to look after; therefore, tying the two pets firmly on to the top of the furniture, they saw them roll along, while they made their own way to the station.

The little cottage which they had taken, stood in a by-street off the main road, and which was built only upon the one side, while opposite lay a disused brickfield, the original owner of which had long gone to the bad. This field was terminated by a very ugly built church, with a cracked bell, hung outside, to call the worshippers to service. In former

times a wall with iron railing had protected the brickfield, which the natives of Pearstone had some hazy ideas of turning into a churchyard by and by. But what through neglect and the village boys overrunning it, and their fathers stealing the bricks to build piggeries with, very little of the original wall remained, and only a few bars of the iron railing.

This by-street belonged to no one properly, and the road authorities refused to recognise its right to have any improvement made upon it, although they did not fail to demand the rates when they were due.

There were about a dozen of cottages in this row, mostly occupied by field labourers, although on Mr. Wilkings' side they made more pretensions at respectability; that is, as far as window-blinds and curtains represented it. These cottages had been taken up by petty clerks in little shops, who stood upon their dignity, and sneered openly at their moleskin-dressed neighbours, on the strength of going to town of a morning in black coats and tall hats.

Dirk noticed many of the windows further up had been broken, and mended with sheets of newspaper by these poor but honest neighbours. Also they were regaled during the afternoon while they waited on their furniture coming, by hearing a very loud and strongly worded controversy going on between a very much beruffled, tattered-robed and bare-armed young woman, who stood leaning against her broken-down gate, with rage and drink-swollen visage, and an old harridan, with gaunt body and dirty-grey white hair, at one of the windows upstairs.

'I suppose this is a specimen of our poor but honest neighbours' kindly ways towards one another,' murmured Dirk, as the adjectives and compliments flew thick and fast from upstairs windows to broken gate. Presently, words seeming to fail the old lady, she pitched out a basin of dirty water over the young, drunken slattern, who, maddened by the unusual contact of water in any shape, bounded with a shrill yell of fury into the front door and up the stairs, where they heard several heavy thuds against the wall nearest to them, intermingled with oaths and furious shrieks.

'Some of our kindly neighbours having a slight difference of opinion, I hear,' observed Dirk to the landlady, who at the moment entered with a disturbed face.

'The first time such a disturbance has taken place since we have been here.'

'My experience also,' answered Dirk, 'only I have not been here very long yet.'

Little Mrs. Wilkings looked at Dirk as if she wasn't very sure whether he was laughing at her or not, then deciding in her own mind that no one could possibly laugh at *her*, she struck up a sentimental attitude with her head on one side, her back against the kitchen window, and her little boy in her arms, and looking out upon the back plot, observed with a heavy sigh:—

'So we had to go, Tommy, and leave all our pretty flowers, had we?'

Dirk looked from the window upon the tumbled patches of sun-baked clay, which represented a garden, with great curiosity, wondering, as he looked, where all the pretty flowers were. A few disconnected blades of withered grass, vainly struggling to maintain a miserable existence on the tops of some of the upturned clay-clumps, were all that he could discern of vegetation, with a couple of pollared stumps at the other end, around which bustled a hoary mass of disillusioned twiggery, not sufficiently dense to carry a sparrow's nest. Clearly Mrs. Wilkings, for all her insignificant appearance and wizzened face, was a woman possessed of a strong and lively imagination, so that Dirk, instead of asking the question, gazed at her with a good deal of admiration.

By this time the shrieks and thuds had ceased upstairs, while the young woman once more appeared at the outside with her arms and face bearing gory traces of her late conflict. She evidently had come off best, for she wore a decided air of triumph, as she stood with waving locks, that is, what remained of her tresses. Perhaps she had succeeded in murdering the old woman, who was now completely silent, Dirk thought; at any rate, the young one stood smiling as broadly as she could smile with a cut lip, and muttering self-congratulatory curses, a long bottle in her hand half-filled with an amber fluid.

'Who is the young lady that had the argument just now?' asked Dirk of his visitor, after he had looked in vain for those flowers of fancy.

'Oh, that is Mrs. Rosebud; a nice, respectable, young

married woman when she isn't vexed,' replied Mrs. Wilkings briskly. She wished to make them satisfied with their bargain.

'She seems a nice quiet neighbour,' remarked Dirk; 'and we must try not to vex her.'

'The old lady is called Mrs. Smithers, a very motherly woman, who you are sure to like, and of French extraction, I believe.'

'A relic of Hastings, I expect,' murmured Dirk; and then he went to look out to see if the van was not appearing in sight yet.

Mrs. Rosebud hailed him from her side of the gate, as he stood looking out upon the road, and he, not wishing to vex the young matron, answered that it was a nice afternoon. Whereupon she immediately asked him if he intended that remark as an insult, or if he would like his adjective eye cut out; to which Dirk did not venture any reply, but made a hasty retreat into his own castle, once more feeling that it would be a difficult matter to keep from vexing this nice quiet neighbour of his when she was on the rampage.

When they had first arrived that forenoon they found a buxom, rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed young woman cleaning up their place. This was the wife of a stalwart labourer, also a neighbour, and one of the quietest, in reality, amongst them. This little woman tried to make them as comfortable as she could by bringing chairs for them to sit upon, while they were waiting on their furniture coming. She chatted very cheerily, and laughed naturally as she worked, and, indeed, looked the only pleasant face which they had seen for the past year. She divided the seasons into two parts. When she told of any event taking place at such or such a time, it was not, 'this happened in the summer or winter,' as is usually the case, but that it happened in 'the time of the hot or cold drinks.'

Neither she nor her husband lived much at home, as she frankly confessed, but spent their Saturday afternoons and other evenings in the public-houses, of which there were seven in the village, and one church.

'Not a many as goes to church,' she observed, 'excepting to 'ave their babies christened; but, Lor' bless you, they all goes to the beer shop.'

Pearstone was as great a place for babies as for beer shops,

and wives felt ashamed to confess to fewer of a family than sixteen or seventeen; the clay soil seemed to be productive of as well as destructive to life. They bred and died by the score, and without remark.

Mrs. Wilkings was singularly cold and haughty in her demeanour towards this laughing little woman, and received her jokes with studied severity. She wished to impress Mrs. Davelock that her social grade was vastly superior to that of a field-labourer's wife. Still, with her fine imaginary turn, she evidently considered that gratitude was due to her for the use of the chairs, for she looked upon them serenely, and trusted that they were now comfortable, and if there was anything *else* she could do for them. This she remarked as she prepared to leave them once more alone, and then, after getting the thanks which she expected, she disappeared, carrying her Tommy, with a gliding step and a whisk of her shabby dress.

They were all very tired and hungry as they waited on the coming of the van, which seemed as if it would never turn up. All through the forenoon and afternoon, in the empty house, with only bread and cheese, which after a time became very monotonous. Mrs. Davelock and Katie were the ones Dirk was most anxious about, for they were both exhausted and pale, and wearying to be able to lie down.

Night came, chill and frosty, a thick white frost; for it was now October; with a heavy, dense, raw fog which seemed to saturate through everything, and still the van did not come. They were all chilled, in spite of the big fires which they kept on, for this fog seemed to settle down and blend with the earth vapours, penetrating everywhere.

Dirk was becoming very alarmed now, yet did not know what to do, for there were three roads by which the van might come from Metaltown, and he feared lest he might miss them and not be there to superintend the unloading, if he went himself to seek for them. At last the little rosy-cheeked woman, Mrs. Gusler, persuaded her husband to leave his favourite corner at the beer-shop bar to take care of itself for an hour or so, for once, and get two of his boon companions to go along the road, and see if they could meet the van and hurry it on.

Each of these honest sons of the soil, fancying this stranger

to be a swell, demanded about a week's wages before they would start upon their night's work, which Dirk was glad enough to give them, so that they would hurry, for this terrible marrow-chilling fog was like nothing he had ever felt before, excepting in the tropical swamps, where the deadly miasma floated. It made his heart contract with anguish to think of those weakly ones, and what they might suffer hereafter through this night's exposure and want of sleep.

'I thought you had no fogs in this quarter,' said Dirk to Mr. and Mrs. Wilkings, whom he saw at their door as he went past for the fiftieth time to see if the van was coming. They had shifted from the fourth to the first cottage.

'It is the very first fog we have seen since we came here,' answered chirpy Mrs. Wilkings; 'a very rare thing here, I can assure you, Mr. Davelock.'

'Strange,' thought Dirk, 'I have just come in time to see the very first row in the street, and the very first fog in the village—what an unfortunate man I must be, and what a demoralising effect I must have on human nature, and the elements as well, to cause such a startling alteration in their usual habits.'

It was long past midnight before Mr. Gusler came back, bringing word that the van was just then coming up the hill. They had had a breakdown half-way, and had to put up at a hotel on the road until fresh horses came from Metaltown. Shortly afterwards the van and men appeared, none the more active for their long spell of rest and refreshment at that half-way house. However, they were there at last, and that was the main matter. So quickly, with the aid of the three labourers, who staggered up, Dirk lugged the bird, cat, and beds out, and fixed them up. Then after a couple of hours' hard labour, he was able to fling himself down beside his already sleeping dear ones, surrounded by the confusion and wreckage of that rapid and drunken tumbling in, and thanked God, as he closed his wearied eyes, that things were no worse.

CHAPTER VIII

TRYING TO CONQUER FATE

SOMETIMES, but not often, you may see a benevolent-looking face passing along the business streets of a great city. Also many earnest faces, with countless hosts of pretentious, crafty, or self-sufficient visages, but seldom, if ever, a happy or contented-looking countenance among the hundreds who are constantly rushing past hour after hour.

One expression sits upon all these different features—feverish anxiety and corroding unrest. They are all hunting, or being hunted, more voraciously for their lives than ever the man-hunters chased their game in the cannibal islands of the Pacific. They dare not pause in that savage race, but with eyes ever fixed onwards, and bodies half bent forward, they dart past on their deadly missions. There is no room for friendship in the city, nor frivolity of any sort, except, perhaps, amongst the printer's little 'devils.' A smile would seem to be impious with those strained and set muscles. The west-end club loungers, or country-bred philosophers, who may, by some evil mischance, find themselves in this mortal purgatory, feel bewildered and appalled as they view this ferocious bustle, and the set intensity of hungry eagerness on every face. They fly back again to their western clubs, or to their native wilds with the vague and nameless horror upon them of having been very close to Hades.

Time passed, and the family had settled down in Pearstone, while Dirk roused himself up, and prepared to join in the savage battle for daily bread.

It was not so easy to shake off these three months of torpor, as he supposed, while his faculties had lain in the damps of despondency, getting rusty, like steel knives in a mildewed house. He found that they would not work when he applied to them; the edge seemed gone; the ideas would

not come, although the inclination was there all right enough. His pencil would not do what he wanted, so that for the first day or two, when he rose in the morning determined to do a big day's work, he looked about him helplessly, wondering what to do first. That was the great difficulty, the start off, and then he went to bed, tired out with his impotent efforts, which ended in nothing.

But poverty is a capital grindstone to sharpen rusty tools upon. They had only a few pounds left, no friends, and no credit. With these facts staring him in the face, he one morning made a sudden dash for the first sketch which lay to hand, and resolutely shutting his eyes to all the others, set himself steadfastly to work.

An hour or so of weak lines and irresolute daubs with the brush, then the spirit of painting came once more upon him, and the mists rose from his brain like the vapours of an autumn morning, and in a week's time he was ready with his portfolio for the hunt once more.

He set out with fear and trembling, for the Moloch bane was still upon him, and he had no confidence in his abilities now. He needed some authority to ratify them, therefore he only sought out the fourth and fifth-class places, which two years ago he would have passed by with scorn, in this hour of humility and self-doubt.

He was not successful at these places. He had his spirits dashed and his pride lowered, before even he reached the editorial offices, by impertinent questions from the outside attendants. He had to wait for hours in dark lobbies with a host of seedy and needy looking applicants, who watched his portfolio with wolfish discontent, and glared him out of countenance while he waited. They regarded him as an interloper, and sought in every way to make him feel it. Later arrivals than himself pushing him rudely to one side, and rushing in before him with their hungry claims.

Then when at last he did see these fifth-rate dictators, they spoke to him insolently and looked at his sketches with supercilious contempt. 'No, that sort of work wouldn't suit their class of customers' finished him up, and he hadn't the pluck left to remonstrate or haggle, but left sadly, with the innate feeling that perhaps Moloch was right in his estimate after all, and that he was useless.

Then he dived lower down in the social scale, to meet only with more brutality and less success. In fact, the lower he went, the longer he had to wait outside, and the more overbearing the editors became. He was getting very near to the end of the lowest rung of all in the ladder of illustrated appeals to public favour, the pavement artist, and only gaining more contemptuous remarks on the incapacity of his specimens and himself. The last place he called at he found the editor as mighty as if thirty Molochs had been concentrated and rolled into one pimply nosed, dirty fisted, and seam-coated God of Art.

He felt limp with dejection, and worn out with fatigue as he turned into one of the by-streets, and sought out the common bar of a disreputable public-house, where only rag-pickers and dock labourers frequented. He felt that they were his proper company, as their drink was the only kind he could now afford, for he had discarded such high fare as stout or bitter, and descended to four ale, which was not served at the private apartments.

Here he leaned against a hogshead as the others were doing, while he consumed his twopenny-worth of fluid, and looked at the low-browed, bull-necked male animals and the besotted horrible faces of the degraded females, while listening to their atrocious talking and garnished mirthless jesting. Yes, Mr. Moloch was right, he was drifting to his proper level, and he began to wonder if it could be possible for him to raise sixpence on his week's hard work, or if he would have to tear them up and starve.

What a mighty and foul dust-heap this Metaltown was, with its reeking mass of senseless corruption. They laughed in this hell if they did not do so in the street; such laughter, and from such hideous, raspy, oath-clogged throats, that it made him shudder.

Dirk thought of the savages he had been among, and compared the worst of them with these savages about him. How noble the far-away ones seemed by the comparison; that grand young aboriginal, Billy; the cannibals who seemed like kings and gods. Then he grew sick at heart with disgust at his present surroundings and unutterable longings of regret, and dragging his wearied limbs over the accursed threshold, he made his way for home.

Next morning, however, somewhat refreshed with his night's rest, he started once more for town. Since he had failed so utterly with the low-caste establishments, he might as well get the condemnation of the upper crust, and so finish the game thoroughly and right away. He had no hope of success, but set out with a certain grim sense of humour to hear the whole world's verdict. He had been humbled so much the day before, that the English language could contain nothing worse to be called, in the way of odium. Nor was it possible for Metaltown noses to express greater disdain, no matter how well turned they might be for the purpose of crushing unknown talent.

He went forth to the defeat with light and springy steps, for he no longer cared one iota for man's opinion. He might be good or bad, he didn't know now, nor care. He was like a woman who has had her reputation torn in shreds, and who has cast shame to the winds. He felt that he would be able to laugh now at insults, since he had been insulted as much as it was possible for mortal man to be; therefore he went along with head held high and easy carriage, not through pride, but rather with brazen shameless effrontery.

So out of bravado he decided to take the very highest amongst them all first, and go down by beautiful gradations until he reached the point from which he had started the day before.

He knew the editorial hours of audience in this aristocratic establishment, as he had been there before, in the days when he felt himself to be of some importance. He walked calmly through the folding doors which the man in livery held open to him respectfully, and took his seat amongst others who were waiting upon their turn.

Engravers and artists of world-recognised abilities were here gathered, among whom Dirk felt, after his previous day's experience, as if he had no longer any more right to sit than a divorced woman has to go into society. Still he did not show his inward feelings of unworthiness, any more than those equivocal ladies do, but entered quite dignified, and took his place with perfect composure. Several of the gentlemen present he had met before, and as they had not seen him since his return, they all chatted amiably about his journey abroad.

This was a well-conducted and decorous establishment,

where no favour was shown to any one. All went upstairs by rotation according to their order of coming, the man in livery apprising each one as his turn for the audience came, and no one disputing his respectful 'You next, sir'; the same as in a fashionable barber's shop when the attendant says 'Your turn now for the shave.'

At length Dirk's turn came, and he went upstairs, and was presently showing his sketches to the editor, who received him with a silent bend of the head, and a wave of the hand courteously towards a chair.

This editor looked long enough and earnestly enough at the sketches for Dirk to feel his bravado vanish into his shoes, and a hot wave of shame to rush over him, unnerving him completely; then oppressed with the silence, he stammered out:—

'They are rough, I will admit!'

'No, Mr. Davelock, they are no rougher than they ought to be. I consider them very good representations,' answered the editor.

Oh, the revulsion of that most unexpected reply! Of course, after that, he would finish up with a polite refusal to take them on the plea of being overcrowded. But what of that, since he had restored the manhood once more to this shame-stricken heart. It was like a complete vindication of his lost character. Dirk could not speak, but waited on the decision with throbbing brain.

'I like them immensely,' continued the editor, who could not know how musical his voice sounded to those hungry ears, how health-giving his words were to that diseased mind. 'But we are very much overcrowded with material at present.'

Dirk could not expect any other reply, yet for those precious words he could have fallen on his knees and kissed this great authority's boots with rapture; still he contained himself and waited, for he saw that the editor was not yet done.

'Yet, as you say' (Dirk had said nothing, but that didn't matter), 'this subject is quite a new one, and we might try to make room for it, in a month or two; could you let it stand over for that time?'

Would he let it wait over for a month or so? Would the dying thief have minded waiting for a month or so for his promised supper in paradise, if he had been asked to wait, with his little expectations, at that bitter hour? Dirk felt his

blood boiling with excitement, so that he could only bend his head in token of his assent to the delay.

'Very well, I accept these illustrations on that condition. By the way, have you any literary matter to go along with them?'

'I can furnish you with what you require, sir.'

'Then let me have, say, a dozen columns as soon as you can, to go along with the pictures.'

'Thank you,' murmured Dirk, to which the editor once more inclined his head, and prepared himself for the next.

Dirk found his way down the stairs, and past the man in livery in a blind daze, bewildered with his most unexpected success. He could see nothing but green and golden flakes before his eyes, flying as thickly as snow upon a winter's day. He was a man, then, after all! Moloch had maligned him; and nearly, but not quite, ruined his self-respect, which was now once more sprouting up fresh and green. 'Oh, God of Heaven! I thank Thee for this grace,' he murmured, casting up his eyes with passionate gratitude as he staggered along the streets, gesticulating, and blind to all the busy passers-by.

'Who are you a-shoving on?' shouted out a message boy, whom he nearly overturned as he rushed along.

'Look out where you are going, you drunken fellow,' cried an old lady, whom he nearly sent through a print-shop window. Then he drew himself up and became aware that he was attracting public attention in a way that he could not wish for, however much he might desire fame, for the sake of its consequences, money, and revenge on the man who had *wronged him so deeply*.

His ability was recognised beyond dispute; he could now hold up his head and prove his vile traducer a liar, for none but the best men were admitted to this magazine. It gave the tone and the hall-mark to a name, before which Moloch must bend his head, for he himself had not been counted good enough, with all his influence, to be represented here, much as he might have desired it. Henceforward and for ever Dirk could take his own place with the leaders and no one dare abuse him, or say that he was incapable.

It was like a blaze of tropical sunshine let suddenly into an underground cell, and, for the time being, Dirk was blind and mad.

CHAPTER IX

GAINING EXPERIENCE

FAME sometimes appears as a plant which springs up like Jonah's gourd in a night, but more often it is of slower growth, like the oak.

This seeming plant which Dirk had set so long before was decidedly growing, but by such slow degrees that it was not improbable he would be planted himself in Mother Earth, before it would be much more than a sapling.

He had now cast aside all thought of Mr. Moloch or the wasted work from his mind for the present, and was concentrating his attention to fresh work, spurred on to new exertions by the encouragement which he had received.

He finished the literary text for his sketches, sent it in, had it approved, and corrected the 'proofs.'

He also did other work and took it about, getting some of it taken up by good firms, and some rejected. He no longer took his rejections as a mark of unworthiness, but, rather, that the present article did not answer their wants. He would set to work again studying the particular style of the magazine he wished to appear in, and adapting himself as much as he could without losing his own individuality. Thus he fell into the regular rut of Metaltown life, and by degrees found himself too busy to be able to mourn over the past.

The literary editor at Messrs. Grabbleson and Co.'s had been as good as his word; 'proofs' were sent of the forthcoming work, also a map for his inspection and correction of the routes taken. These he corrected and duly returned.

September, November, and December passed, and with Christmas, the first instalment of the book came out.

Hodge told him when they met one day in town, that it was out, and that Moloch had sent him a copy.

Dirk was eager to see how far he had been represented in it, so after waiting for a couple of weeks in vain for his copy, he sent off a cheque to the firm and ordered one. It is a customary courtesy for artists and authors to get presentation copies of the books in which their work appears, but Messrs. Grabbleson and Co. broke through this rule in his particular case. Mr. Moloch had resolved to extend no courtesy towards him whatever.

However, they returned him a receipt for his money, and with it the first volume. Here he saw that his literary matter had been honourably enough acknowledged. Many of his illustrations also had been used, as he had sent them home, but with other *names* upon them, all save in one instance, where one of his most hasty notes had been reproduced by process with his signature attached; that is, his best work had been pirated and forged, and his worst left in the rough. Mr. Moloch had resolved to ruin him completely in the estimation of the public, and took this dishonourable method of doing it.

He now perceived how false and vindictive this art editor was, and what hatred he must have felt, when he found that the literary editor had done Dirk justice in his department. Moloch had meant to blank him totally out, and it must have been a bitter disappointment to him when he found that he could not entirely manage it. However, that the pictures had been used proved to Dirk that his charges were all unfounded; he could now go on confidently upon his chosen path.

He had some thoughts of taking action against the firm for the piracies and forgeries. He felt that he had a splendid case, as the whole affair was a conspiracy and actionable. But he had not enough cash to pay for a good lawyer's fee, far less sustain the battle against this wealthy house, and as he knew from past precedents that law is not made for the poor man, he gave up that idea; contenting himself by daring them to sue him for the things of his which were appearing from time to time, and which in their last notice they had called their exclusive property.

Mr. Moloch did not take this mode of revenge—it was much too fair and above-board for his mole-like habits—but he went to work in another and more congenial method.

Dirk was made to feel that they had never lost sight of him for a moment, and also that, like the octopus, they had long tenacious claws. When he had an article and sketches accepted anywhere, the publishers were always very flattering and pleased with them, and as soon as they appeared they were well reviewed by the papers. But afterwards, when he applied again with another contribution, it was invariably refused and himself coldly received. This was particularly the case where the class of magazines, etc., were of the similar order of Messrs. Grabbleson and Co.'s publications.

Sometimes the octopus claws were just discernible and no more; at other times they were very plainly revealed.

At one time he received an order from a firm to make a number of illustrations for a book coming out; the subjects were distinctly specified and the number given. He did the commission, and in a day or two received a very flattering note, entirely approving of his work. Yet, a fortnight afterwards, he received his sketches back, minus two, of which, however, no mention was made in the polite little letter which accompanied them, and in which they thanked him for the *sight* of his beautiful pictures.

Of course he could have forced this firm to keep to their order, if he could have afforded to have gone to law with them, but that he could not. However, he wrote, reminding them that there were two sketches short of the original number sent, for which they apologised, and sent him a cheque. Possibly they did not give him credit for being so methodical in his habits, artists and authors seldom are.

At another time he got an order from the sub-editor of a journal for a year's supply of illustrations. He was to supply them month by month. He fulfilled his engagement for the first three months and received good notices. The sub-editor was delighted with his work, so, evidently, was the proprietor, for Dirk received a letter from this gentleman, not directly addressed to himself, but to the sub-editor, ratifying the engagement, with the price, and thanking him for securing such valuable contributions. After the three months, however, the sub-editor severed his connection with the paper, and the proprietor wrote to Dirk, declining any more work, and offering him half of the original price agreed upon for the work done, at the same time adding a postscript in which

he said that he was quite unaware of the original arrangement, else he would never have given his consent to have them done.

Dirk could forgive a little stretch of the imaginative faculties on the part of little Mrs. Wilkings, but it was quite another matter with a philanthropist who delivered himself of such touching articles on the beauty of Truth and Charity, so he just tacked the two letters together and waited personally with them upon this veracious gentleman.

At first this gentleman stormed and bullied, denying everything for the sake of the few guineas which he was owing. Then when Dirk quietly read the two letters over to him, he collapsed like a burst air-bladder, and paid his debt. Of course Dirk might have made him pay up the entire year, or even got something handsome in the way of blackmail for those unlucky letters; but he was content with cancelling the nine months and receiving payment for the work he had actually done, leaving the fictionist scowling at him very blackly. In his own mind he had revenge enough, and he knew where the pressure had come from which had caused this unhappy backsliding.

Generally, when any of his work was rejected, he got it back clean, so that he could use it elsewhere. But once, however, he got the sketches back crushed and damaged beyond all further use, and without note or apology, and bearing the old familiar hob-nail and crutch trade-marks of Mr. Hacker over them, which stamped his first introduction to Grabbleson and Co. Then he knew that his old poetic and art-writing enemy was on his track, and that he must have changed his quarters. This, upon inquiry, he found to be the case. He had been dismissed from the service of the Grabblesons (two jackals could not get on over one bone), and had found a temporary haven in this new shop, to which Dirk had, in ignorance, sent his contributions. Henceforth he took care to follow the course of this venomous reptile, so that he might avoid him for the future.

CHAPTER X

COUNTRY LIFE

CASH was coming in, but not very regularly, nor in any large sums, yet the Davelocks had already begun to have the name of being good payers in Pearstone; as the milkman remarked, 'When they has it, they pays regular by the week, but sometimes it may run over a bit.'

It was true, at times, cash came to a very low ebb indeed, and it had to run over, which the milk never did as to measure. But hitherto it had always come to hand when most wanted, although at times they had some anxious moments and many heart burnings.

They were keeping the 'wolf from the door' by strict economy, hoping for better times; yet he was never driven far beyond the gate. There he sat and bayed at them all the week long, while they strove to drive him out with might and main, from the youngest to the eldest—a terrible grey and lank-bodied wolf which would not go away.

They all knew that it was there, for the father and mother spoke about their affairs openly now that there were no strangers near to them, and in this little labourer's cottage they had no need to study dignity. Sometimes the little pale-faced Katie would say to her sister, when she got upstairs, after she had listened to all their troubles with open eyes, 'I wonder who Mr. Moloch can be who has hurt papa so much. He must be a fearfully wicked man. I must ask God to make him suffer all that he has made papa suffer.'

Then she remembered Mr. Moloch's name in her nightly prayer, and asked God to punish him as he deserved—unfortunate man to have a child's prayer going straight up to God nightly against him, instead of for him. How could he expect to escape calamity and retribution?

They were not very ambitious for applause now, for somehow that dream had passed away for Dirk, even while he was getting it daily. Yet the papers were lauding each effort he made, while he only waited in that echoless village working hard to make enough to keep them all, and hardly ever seeing a newspaper. He knew that the world sometimes spoke of his work, and that he had in reality triumphed over Mr. Moloch's verdict, for when he went into town with his week or fortnight's results, casual acquaintances told him about it. But he did not heed that now so long as he got enough remuneration to satisfy his creditors and keep his children.

That is the worst of fame, it never comes near enough to take a firm hold of. It always seems so close to some one else, and such a beautiful object to look at when afar off. But when it is surrounding oneself it is like a rainbow; nothing but a bodiless combination of prismatic vapour, and neither gourd nor an oak to the possessor.

Sometimes when Dirk took an early walk in the morning before beginning work, he met one of the most celebrated men of the day, who lived close by, driving to the station. He used to note him from the odour of the fine cigar which he invariably puffed as he drove along, for Dirk was a judge of good cigars although he never smoked any himself. This man made his hundreds of thousands by his art, and yet no one had a more discontented expression as he drove past. Dirk used to wonder if he was thinking of the rainbow, in spite of his wealth and great name.

The village people were all getting ready for Christmas, going into beer-shops, goose and drink clubs, when Mrs. Davelock's health gave way. They were not destined to spend a merry Christmas.

Dirk had three orders on hand at this time, all wanted in a hurry, which occupied him constantly, so that much as he would have liked to have waited on his wife himself, he had to look out for some one else to nurse her and to look after the house.

It was not exactly a case where a doctor was required, at least not just at the moment; rather where the kindly attentions of a skilled nurse would come in. He applied, under the circumstances, to Mrs. Wilkings as the most likely to know about such a person.

Yes, she knew such a woman exactly, who was much better than many a doctor, and with whom Mrs. Davelock would be quite safe. Dirk, on this recommendation, sent round for the old woman and village nurse, Mrs. Oggles.

It was an exceedingly bad time to get any one to attend duty just then in Pearstone, for Christmas was near, and they were thinking much more upon roast-beef than service. When Mrs. Oggles did appear, it was with a very defiant cocked-up eye, and a decided look of Sarah Gamp about her fiery countenance. She was massive and apopletic-like, and when she squatted upon the biggest chair in the bedroom, which she did upon entering, she hid it completely from view. She liked to do her duty sitting, so all the time she was in attendance she issued her orders in a domineering manner from her chair, and kept Dirk and the children busy attending to her countless wants.

She had a habit of cocking up one eye like an ex-commodore, and transfixing the person she looked at, as if she was gimleting him. A shrewd-looking, business woman, who did not give way to any sentiment until her fifth or sixth glass of brandy, and then she was wont to shed a tear or two over the memory of the departed Oggles, who had left her about ten years previously; after 'worritting' her, as she expressed it, for about half a life-time with his dreary rheumatics.

Having entered, given a sharp survey of the premises, and placed herself comfortably, she began the investigation of her case, by saying briskly:—

'Now, sir, afore we begin, has you got a bottle of brandy in the house?'

'No, Mrs. Oggles, but I can get one,' answered Dirk.

'That's right, sir, get it at once, and the best whiles you are about it.'

Dirk rushed off to the corner shop for the brandy, thinking it was for the patient, during which time Mrs. Oggles slowly untied her widow's bonnet, and relieved herself of her shawl, without as yet turning her face towards Mrs. Davelock.

'Here is the brandy, nurse, but don't give her too much at a time, as she is not used to it.'

'I won't, sir, you may depend upon me for that.'

Mrs. Oggles now gave her commands for a glass, a tumbler, and some water; which, when brought, she mixed up a stiff

jorum, remarking casually as she did this, 'I never could a-bear my liquor without water.' With which information she tossed it off, and once more corked up the bottle.

'Now, my dear, tell me all about your trouble.' She turned towards the bed in a kindly but gruff way, and putting her head forward, prepared to listen.

After the symptoms were explained, she said:—

'Jest so!—it's the narves, I'm troubled that way myself. We'll have the kettle on and get a good strong cup of tea right off.'

She glanced towards Dirk as she spoke, as if she expected him to go at once and see to the kettle. But by this time he was getting a little worn-out with her numerous calls upon him, and knowing that he must get back to his work, suggested that perhaps she would like some one to help her.

'Well, sir, we would all be the better of another pusson in the house to give me a hand.'

Nurse Oggle was busily mixing up another tumbler of grog as she spoke.

'Do you know any trustworthy woman whom I could get?'

'Yes, sir, there's old Mrs. Smithers, next door, she knows my ways best, and is used to me, get her.'

So one of the children was sent round for Mrs. Smithers, who had not been murdered in that encounter, as Dirk had supposed, and who was not long in making her appearance; followed by the gentle Mrs. Rosebud, who now appeared to be her most loving friend.

Dirk felt a slight thrill of dismay as he saw the amiable pair enter, but it was too late to draw back. He had to make the best of it, being in the hands of the Philistines.

Both ladies entered with heavy men's boots on their feet, which made a great clatter as they put them down, and now that he saw Mrs. Smithers completely, he rather admired the pluck of the slim Rosebud during that encounter. Her former enemy, but now bosom friend, stood nearly six feet in her hob-nailed boots, with a massive shock of dirty, short and uncombed hair, round a head solid enough to serve in a siege as a battering-ram. A powerful, but gaunt and large-boned woman of about sixty, who had reckoned up her total

of nineteen children, and outlived three husbands during her pilgrimage through this vale of tears, without casting a single hair of that tangled mane.

Dirk thought of a mane when he looked at her head, because in features she strongly resembled an old cart-horse.

They were both, however, rather pale-faced and languid as they came in, for they had been on short commons for the past week or two, Mrs. Rosebud's long-necked bottle not having been seen so frequently on the road lately. They both drooped directly they caught sight of the tumbler of brandy which Mrs. Oggles was easily holding in her hand. This 'sinking' state the nurse, now in a kindly mood, observed, and said:—

'Mrs. Rosebud, my dear, just go inter the kitchen and some of the children will git ye a couple of glasses, or cups if the glasses ain't handy; you will both be the better of a tasting afore ye begins.'

Mrs. Davelock, who had always possessed a sense of humour, glanced at the dismayed Dirk with a twinkle in her hollow eyes. Although too helpless to speak at that moment, he read the glance which seemed to say, 'Best get them what they want.' So he accompanied the younger matron into the kitchen and gave her the glasses, telling her to send Mrs. Smithers in as soon as possible, so that he might show her where things were, which Mrs. Rosebud promised to do. Then he waited behind in case his presence might act as a restraint upon their talking in the bedroom.

In a little while Mrs. Rosebud appeared with the empty decanter for more water, with a humid flush upon her flabby face and a decided roll of the eye. Through being stinted of late, the drink had affected her the more easily.

'I am glad you have come to stay beside us, sir, for there is nothing stuck-up about you, not like your next door neighbour' (the next door was foreman at a timber-yard in the city, and went in for gentility). 'He goes about with a face like a well-scraped pig, and can't pass the time of day with a respectable woman because she is poor—the ugly beast. But I'll go for his slobbery jaws some day when my temper is up, you see if I don't.'

Mrs. Rosebud had forgotten her present mission, and was raising her voice almost to a shriek as she recalled her

grievances. Dirk, fearful of the fatal consequences of vexing her, yet thinking upon the invalid, said in a mild tone, 'Hush, Mrs. Rosebud, not so loud.'

'Why should I hush, I 'd jolly well like to know?'

'The invalid next room, you know.'

'Ah, true, sir, you are right; we mustn't disturb her.' She lowered her voice to a stage whisper. 'As I was a-telling of you, sir, I knows a nice man when I sees one, and you are one, I'll bet me buttons—just such another as my uncle——'

At this moment the bedroom door opened with a burst, and Mrs. Smithers put her head out, bawling like a drill instructor. 'Here Mrs. Rosebud, ain't you a-coming with that 'ere water-jug?'

'Here you are, my dear, fill it up at the tap for yourself,' replied Mrs. Rosebud, stretching out the empty decanter without budging from her seat on the table, which stood between her and Dirk. Mrs. Smithers, grumbling like distant thunder, seized the decanter and tramped along the lobby to the back tap, while the other, folding her arms, continued her remarks: 'As I was a-telling on you, sir—where the dickens was I at when that great beetle-crusher broke in?'

'Your uncle,' returned Dirk.

'Ah yes! Well, that uncle of mine was the comicalist card as ever you see; he was a capting—one of them chaps, you know, who unloads ships when they come home from a long voyage.'

'I know,' remarked Dirk.

'I used to go down to the ships, sometimes with my brother, for I was just a slip of a gal at the time, and got all sorts of things out o' him, particularly when he had a drop. Sometimes it would be a packet of tea, or my pinafore crammed with sugar, or 'baccy for dad; and then, lor', we had to run amongst the planks to get out o' the road afor the customs came along. He had gone through lots of adventures that uncle of mine, who was so like you, sir. Been in foreign parts lots of times, and in—in——'

Mrs. Rosebud was very ready generally with her words, but had somehow come to a hank in her yarn, so Dirk, to help her along, suggested: 'In jail, perhaps?'

'Ah, lots of times. Lor', he was hardly ever out o' quod, for some prank or another. He was that quarrelsome when he was sober, which, however, wasn't mor'n once a week at most.'

'He must have been a nice man!'

'He wor, sir, when he wor drunk, very; but, lor' help you, if you dropped upon him when he wor sober. A bear with a sore head was nowhere beside him. He'd take us up and smack us properly; but when he was well primed up, you couldn't meet a more agreeable man walking. He'd spend his money that free and handsome, pulling out handfuls of silver and letting harf-crowns roll into the mud for us to scramble after as if they was flash uns.'

Mrs. Rosebud had not rusticated all her young life in the country, Dirk thought as he listened.

'I bet that you were smart enough with your fingers for the old boy, drunk or sober, weren't you, Mrs. Rosebud?'

'You'd say I wor if you had seen me, sir, in those days, all over his pockets, and about the decks as well. Smart both with my hands and my heels, but then, lor' bless you, I ain't nothing now in the way of smartness to what I used to be.'

'The country air, I expect.'

'That's about it; an' the having a cow of a man, who ain't got any idea of what fun is—not but what he is a good enough sort of a fellow,' continued Mrs. Rosebud reflectively. 'Though he don't allow me much liberty or money—you see the Salvationists have spoilt him of late.'

'Is he a Salvationist?'

'Ah, a proper hot 'un—out all night nearly, praying and shouting like mad—all about the lanes with the lasses.'

'With the lasses?' echoed Dirk incredulously, who did not quite comprehend.

'Yes, you know, the left-tenants—General Booth's singing Maries.'

'And are you never jealous of him, Mrs. Rosebud?'

'Me jealous of my little chap and the halleluah gang o' feymale sodgers! Lor', bless you, he knows one too many for that. I'd wring his miserable little neck like a chicken's if he tried that game on with me. But he wouldn't, for he is real, you see, sir; it isn't sham with him, no ways; he's

downright struck on praying, as fond on it as I am of—of my beer when I can get it.'

'I suppose your uncle is dead now, Mrs. Rosebud?' asked Dirk, who was not greatly interested in her Salvationist husband.

'Yes, poor man, he broke his neck down the hold jist a fortnight after the pirates tried to steal the ship he was looking after.'

'Pirates on the river?'

'Lor' bless you, sir, yes, they are as plentiful there as rats. I mind once when we were down seeing him, and it came on dark so that we were afraid to go home, that they came crawling up, a dozen an' more, with daggens, you know them sort of things that you stabs with.'

'Daggers?'

'That's the word, and revolvings for shooting. Lor', each had about twenty barrels apiece, it was awful——'

It was a wonderful story, and Dirk was getting thoroughly interested in it, when Nurse Oggles brutally put a stop to it all, by waddling out of the bedroom and bringing up the narrator with a bang, by saying in her bully tone:—

'Now, then, you jist shut up your jawr, Mrs. Rosebud, and go home for the present, for you're a disturbing of my patient. D'ye hear?—stump!'

Dirk dare not laugh, much as he felt inclined to do so, at the picture of blank amazement which Mrs. Rosebud at that moment presented as she stood with wildly glaring eyes and open mouth. She had been gliding along so pleasantly that it seemed almost too cruel a blow for even a patient woman to bear.

'Come again some other day and finish that story of your'n,' the implacable one said. 'But jist at present clear out, for Mrs. Davelock wants to sleep.'

It might have been bitter war but for those last words, which had hardly been delivered before Mrs. Rosebud, closing her open mouth like a rat-trap, bounced out of the house without a single word more of farewell, leaving the bulky Mrs. Oggles mistress of the field.

CHAPTER XI

NURSES AND DOCTORS

THE common tipple of this country's labouring class is what they term 'four-ale,' a harmless and economical beer, something of the consistency and strength of German 'Lager Beer' without its fictitious sparkle. Scientists say it is a much more wholesome drink than bitter ale, being too cheap to be adulterated to the same extent, and that it might be a very popular drink with the upper classes if it only cost tenpence or fourteenpence instead of fourpence per quart.

Nurse Oggles was an able enough woman, and skilled in country herb craft, and where properly controlled, and kept to her place, did her duty thoroughly and honestly enough. But this was Christmas time. She had been at a number of consecutive births of late, which are, to say the least, demoralising to either man or woman, and she saw that she had easy victims, whom it would be almost a sin not to make as much out of as she could, while she had them to command. However, after a week, she was called suddenly away on an urgent case, therefore they were left to shift as best they could.

Mrs. Rosebud didn't call to finish her interesting story. She was proud in her way, if poor, and now hurried past, when the Salvationist husband left her any money, with her long-necked bottle, but with averted head.

Mrs. Wilkings called once or twice, but only when her husband was at home. He sent her to offer her assistance, but she always proffered it in such a way that Dirk had to refuse. She came along because her kindly husband commanded her, but managed to add something nasty each time she came. Then she pretended to him that she had done a

great deal. Dirk began to see that she was of a spiteful and narrow turn as well as imaginative, and therefore troubled her as little as possible.

Then he tried to get other nurses, with the same success, until at last he was almost desperate, for his children looked terribly neglected, and his poor wife was growing weaker. The last housekeeper had told them that their mother was dying, so the tender-hearted Katie, weakly herself, had held blankets to the fire to warm her mother, the big tears rolling down her cheeks all the while, and her little tender heart like to burst, while Adrian, the youngest boy, grew like a ghost. Neither of them had had their faces washed while the women were in, or a right meal. They were all too busy gorging themselves, and Dirk had been working day and night to finish his commission in time, and get money to keep the fearsome extravagance going. All the while the mother lay in that low nervous fever of prostration, unable to lift a limb.

Going to the front door one day he saw Mrs. Pigott, his next neighbour, to whom he told his perplexity, glad to have some one to talk to.

'I would get a doctor if I was you,' she said.

'Do you know a good doctor, Mrs. Pigott?'

'Yes, there is Doctor Howler Addit. He is a first-class man, and so moderate.'

'But I must have a woman to look after things as well.'

'Then I think I know a relation of my husband's who would come to oblige me.'

'I would be so grateful if you would get her.'

So Mrs. Pigott went straightway off to get this relation of her husband's, while Dirk went for the doctor.

This doctor did not live in the village, but he had a place of call, and came daily, so Dirk left word for him to come as soon as he arrived, and went home to wait and nurse his wife meanwhile.

By and by the doctor came, a young white-faced man, who drove up in a smart dog-cart, and bounced into the house without knocking. He had heard all about the Davelocks' experiments with nurses, and had come resolved to punish him for what he thought was his meanness in not sending for him at first.

His first greeting did not impress Dirk with much respect.

'So you have had to send for me at last, have you? I expect you will find yourself penny wise and pound foolish over this affair.'

'I beg your pardon, Dr. Addit,' answered Dirk rather indignantly, as he thought upon all he had spent already; 'I did not think either on pounds or pennies where my wife was concerned, neither did I know about you until this morning. But come in and see your patient.'

The doctor bounced in, felt her pulse, and then, turning to Dirk, said insolently:—

'You have sent for me too late—the woman is dying.'

'Good God, doctor, come outside and speak to me; don't be so coarse in this room.'

'Well, I'll try to pull her through; but you mustn't starve her, you know. Get her some port wine; pour it into her "by the quart."'

'Yes,' said Dirk, hating the brute who so openly accused him of starving his darling; he who was ready to spend his life for her.

Dirk didn't at that time know that this was the doctor's usual way of beginning business, so that he might have all the credit if his patients lived. At the present moment he only felt the bitterness of death upon him.

'Time's up, I must go!' cried the doctor, pulling out his watch.

'I would like you to look at my children as well while you are here.'

'Not for the same fee, eh?'

'Dr. Addit, I have not asked your price yet. I ask your medical advice. Will you look at them or not?'

'It will be an extra charge, mind,' grumbled the doctor.

'What you like,' said Dirk, who saw the man he had to deal with, and didn't quite believe in his brutal statement with regard to his wife, although, at the same time, feeling horribly afraid.

After looking at the children, Katie and Adrian, he said: 'Yes, they are very ill, indeed, and I ought to have been sent for long ago.'

'Never mind that now,' remarked Dirk quietly. 'They

are under your charge from this time, and I trust you will do the best you can. By the way, what are your fees, doctor?'

Dirk felt a little shy as he put the question, in spite of his experience and indignation, although he need not have been with this noble specimen of the medical profession. He got rid of all superlative feelings of sensitiveness when he heard the reply delivered promptly, and with businesslike brevity:—

'Three and sixpence to the very poorest class per visit when paid in cash, four and sixpence if I have to send in my account, and so on up to ten and sixpence and a guinea, according to the position of my patients.'

'I suppose that you give some little show of respect for the higher fees, such as knocking at doors, taking off your hat, and speaking about and to a lady properly, as a man ought to? Do you, doctor?' inquired Dirk innocently, desirous of getting all the information that he could on the subject of these novel rates of charge.

'I haven't been disrespectful to you or your wife that I am aware of,' answered the doctor sulkily.

'Are you not? Well then, doctor, you had best consider us as your very poorest class of patients, and let that be understood for the future. Here are your three and sixpence; there is no use paying for more than we can get, is there?'

'Certainly not. You know your own circumstances best.'

So war was declared between the two men.

'Will I get any medicine, doctor?' observed Dirk, seeing that this refined party was pulling on his gloves preparatory to going.

'I'll send over what is necessary.' Saying which he bolted out of the house, and dashed away to his next poor or respectable victim.

CHAPTER XII

NEIGHBOURS

DR. HOWLER ADDIT was an infamous exception to the noble profession which he disgraced. He used to write a great number of letters after his name when he was signing vaccination and birth or death certificates, but for all that he was not respected much by any of his brother practitioners about the place. He never wrote down prescriptions, but, instead, made up his own medicine. Patients who once had him in were compelled to trust him utterly, and send for him often, while, at the same time, they were completely at his mercy; entirely ignorant of how he was treating them, and had no accusing bits of writing to bring against him if anything went wrong.

He was the most mendacious, as well as the most incapable man that Dirk could possibly have admitted to his house, which Mrs. Pigott knew as well as any one in the village. She was one of the indefatigable gossips and mischief-makers about this unholy upshooting of ramshackle buildings. She could no more help doing a bad turn when the opportunity occurred, than she could help being envious towards any one she thought better off than herself, or impertinent towards those she thought were her inferiors.

She had no active cause for dislike towards the Davelocks at present. They were too wretched and hope-forgotten to be regarded otherwise than with indulgent contempt. But when she suggested the doctor, it was out of a pure desire to have some fun, for she had sent for him once for herself, and knew the world too well to send for him again. They were fools, the Davelocks, who did not know the value of money, so she only thought to punish them for their idiocy.

The nurse question was, however, another affair. Self-

interest came in here, for she had seen the wholesale riot and robbery going on for the past week or two, therefore she determined to get some profit out of it for herself, while the fool's money lasted, hence the reason for her taking the extraordinary trouble of going to find and bring this relative of her husband.

There was a dreary monotony and sameness of motive through all the people who had hitherto been flung into the lives of the Davelocks. Just a little difference in the mode of their expressing their natures, some a little more tricky and monkeyish in their narrowness and ill-will, which gave it a very slight variety; greed, suspicion, envy, and treachery marked them all with one deep and broad brand.

Dr. Howler Addit had only been about a year in the neighbourhood. A twelvemonth before, a respectable practice had been for sale, and which a well-known Metaltown doctor, wishing for a quiet country life, had purchased. Before he got settled, however, this pirate had what they call in colonial parlance 'jumped the claim.' That is, he had rushed down and invaded the ground, taken a flash villa within a stone's throw of the old-established house, and put up an immense brass-plate; while the other man was leisurely making his preparations to move in, all unsuspicious of this upstart rival, who had paid nothing; and before the other was nearly ready, had filched half of the customers from him.

It was a piece of sharp practice which, of course, disgusted a few of the old residenters about the place. Still, many having ignorantly applied to him, under the impression that he was the legitimate successor of the former practitioner, did not take the trouble of turning him away. Indeed, it was not an easy matter to get rid of Dr. Howler Addit, once he got his nose inserted into a family.

Then with half, or less, of the money which the other man had paid for the practice, he invested in a smart get-up, and dashed about the country on fine horses, or different conveyances. He did it all on the hire system, so that he could make a constant change, appearing nearly every week in a different get-up and rig-out. He was quite prepared to carry the day by sheer bounce and audacious display.

The other man, with all his skill and experience, in his modest machine hadn't the ghost of a chance alongside of

this impudent and glaring impostor, who was here, there, and everywhere with his dashing groom and flash clothes, dazzling the eyes of the vulgar villagers. He took possession of his patients by main force, and kept possession of them by frightening them nearly to death. He was like a vampire ghoul pouncing upon and battening upon corruption.

What cared he what the legitimate craft said about him, so long as he was able to bounce the dollars out of his victims. What although he killed them off by the score, so long as he was able to live and thrive himself?

And this was the right place for a man of his stamp to practise in, where there was hardly a healthy man, woman, or child about. White-faced and consumptive himself, with a greedy, rolling eye for ever on the watch for fresh victims, he lived alone for his vile trade, not out of affection or zeal for science, nor any regard for humanity, but for the sake of the cash to be coined out of it.

He was indefatigable and never off the road day nor night, driving along like the wind, pocket-book in hand noting down his calls like a bookmaker at a race-course. Looking eagerly right and left at every face he passed, so that he might not forget to lift his hat to the rich. Arrogant to the poor, whom he passed by like a pawnbroker. (He had been known often to sit in a cottage, where he thought his fee wasn't very sure, while the wretched husband or father went out to borrow the cash, before he would look at the patient; and on those occasions he charged them extra for the time they made him wait.) He was never pleasant in his manner to any one, for he was too hungry for trade to waste time in courtesy. But he could be servile and sneaking as a Hindoo valet, when he thought it served his end to be so.

A young man with the soul and air of an octogenarian miser in spite of all his bounce and fine clothes. With legs, one a little bent outwards (these are the keen money hunters who are so shaped), he bounced along when on foot, always as if he was upon a case of life and death.

This was the animal to whom Dirk had now intrusted the lives of his wife and family, while there were good men and true all about to be had at half the price, as the best of everything always can be had. Truly, he had a deal to be grateful for to his kind neighbour, Mrs. Pigott.

By and by Mrs. Tabbis arrived with her friend, Mrs. Pigott, and, as far as Dirk could judge of faces, this woman looked orderly, active, and respectable. She was quite willing to undertake the general duties of the house, but as she had no experience in the sick-chamber, she was timid about undertaking this portion of the work, and said so candidly at the start, for which Dirk liked her all the better, and promised to get Mrs. Oggles as soon as possible to superintend the nursing department. This he succeeded in doing that same afternoon, and after introducing the women to each other, and telling them what he expected from them, he shut himself in once more to his work, leaving to them the rest of the house.

He was working now against time, for besides having promised the work up to date, the past few weeks had left him deeply in debt to grocers, butchers, bakers, and milkmen. The women having *carte blanche* to order as they pleased, had gone freely to each of the tradesmen and ordered lavishly. It was the first time that Dirk had taken things on credit, and he began now to feel glad that he was able to do so; such a state of things being impossible in Metaltown. Of course the grocer made him pay dearer for every article as he marked it down, and gave light weight, as did the butcher and baker; while a fortnight's trust seemed to be the limit to their plausibility. But even for this favour he had cause to be grateful. With a terribly anxious heart, he laboured constantly day and night, with his eyes and hands working feverishly, and his thoughts upon his prostrate wife and miserable little ones. He was trying his hardest to get done so that he might devote himself to them, rushing down to the sick-room whenever he could spare a moment, and then back again to the task.

Mrs. Tabbis was a very quiet, self-contained woman, who made no demonstration, but went about her duties silently, and hardly ever spoke. Yet, when she did, it was in a spasmodic way, as if eager to get rid of her burden of speech rapidly, after which she would draw herself up again as if ashamed of having so far given herself away. A woman of about fifty-five, who had been very comely in her youth, with dark eyes and crimpy hair. Mrs. Pigott had told Dirk that she had a peculiar temper, and was very easily offended if any one interfered with her in her work, so he took care just

to let her do what she liked, and for the while she was there, he had no great cause to complain about her.

A few days more and his task would be completed, and then he could look after things himself. So that he never looked up from his work, but let them do as they pleased, working on doggedly with a heavy heart, and in the midst of a layer of dust, for no one during the past four weeks had thought it worth while to tidy up his room, and he had no leisure to do so himself. When he grew too tired to work any more, he would run downstairs and let the nurse go to bed while he took her place. It was then that Mrs. Davelock got a little rest and attention which had to last her for another day. A weary and irritable time, during which he hardly slept, taking his rest in a chair by the side of his wife, or when overcome at his work, by snatches.

Every day, to an hour, came the doctor, who bounced in, spoke loudly and coarsely for a moment to his helpless patient, and then darted up to where Dirk worked, for his fee. However, after the first day or two, he said that it would suit him best to mark it down. He had seen something of Dirk's in a popular magazine, and thought he would be safe to pay, and he could make more out of him that way. Dirk, who began to abhor the daily sight of this mercenary wretch, gladly agreed to the new arrangement, to be rid of him.

At last the work was done, and he felt free.

'Now, my darling, I'll be able to look after you,' he said, as he took his place in the sick-room, and deputed Mrs. Tabbis to the children's bedroom to look after Adrian and Katie.

'I am glad, dear, that you are able to come at last, for I feel now as if you will bring me round. That fearsome doctor and the nurse have been killing me between them; get rid of them all, as soon as you can,' she whispered faintly in his ear.

'Have you had your beef tea and wine yet?'

'I cannot eat anything unless you cook it; it all tastes so nasty. The dishes are never washed.'

Dirk took up the wine-glass; it was cloggy with old wine dregs. Everything about the room was in the same state. His wife had outlived her fever, but was likely now to die

of neglect and dirt. Then Dirk took his coat off and set resolutely to work to sort up the bedroom.

He next overhauled the medicine bottles, of which there was a table laden, and as a first step towards reform, emptied them all out. He didn't know what they contained, but he had an instinctive feeling that they were rubbish, if not worse, After this Mrs. Davelock began to pick up, slowly at first, for she had been very close to death. But gradually, every day showed Dirk an improvement. Perhaps the general discomfort of the past few weeks had acted as a stimulant; at any rate, to Dirk's joy, she began to eat what he prepared for her, and ask for more, as well as to sleep better than she had done.

Still the doctor came daily and shook his head over her, at which Dirk smiled to himself.

'She is mighty far gone,' the doctor said one day.

'What do you think is the matter, doctor?' inquired Dirk.

'Oh! consumption, of course; both lungs completely riddled; may last a month or two with my medicine, but there isn't the slightest hope of her ever recovering; not a hope!'

This he said in accordance with his usual system, before Mrs. Davelock.

'Do you think so, doctor?'

'I know it,' returned the doctor decidedly. He is half way to success who can be decided enough, still this humbug did not deceive Dirk for one moment with all his decision. 'I could have saved her three months ago, had I been sent for in time.' And off he bolted to the next death-bed. Few of Dr. Howler Addit's patients survived, although some of them, thanks to their original robust and non-sensitive constitution, managed to survive long enough to ruin their relatives.

One day he came in just about the time when Mrs. Davelock was feeling a great inclination to get up. She had been mending very rapidly for the past day or two, so that her husband felt as if his troubles were coming to an end.

'Your wife is much worse to-day,' he said as soon as he entered.

'Is she?' replied Dirk.

'Yes. I must have a consultation over her, so propose to call in another doctor. Of course I have your permission!'

'Yes,' replied Dirk, wishing to see how far his impudence would carry him.

Next morning a young man called, who said he was to meet Dr. Addit there. Dirk asked him politely inside, and during the course of conversation, while waiting on the arch-humbug, discovered that he was the doctor who was to share the consultation. Dirk also learned by some adroit questions that this young man was merely a visitor to Dr. Addit, and as yet only a medical student. Dr. Addit liked to make his visitors profitable when he could.

The two men met, and looked with gloomy eyes at Mrs. Davelock for a few moments, who regarded them with an amused light in hers.

'Do you spit blood?' inquired the student gravely.

'No,' she replied.

'Have you any cough?'

'No.'

Both men shook their heads gravely over this, and retired to a corner of the room where they began to whisper together.

'It is just as I said,' uttered Dr. Addit coming forward. 'My friend agrees with me that your wife's case is most critical—most critical, both lungs completely gone; in fact, it is now only a question of a few days.'

He was right; the question was decided definitely in a very few days by Mrs. Davelock getting up, and clearing her house of the whole gang of pirates.

They took their *congé* in various ways; the doctor with dire threats of the fatal results of a relapse, and the trouble Dirk would get into with the authorities through dismissing him too soon. He also sent in the account within half an hour of his departure, with instructions to the bearer to wait payment—a bill of such noble proportions that it made Dirk's hair nearly rise on end, and almost swamped him in the settling.

They had now the house to themselves once more, but, oh, such a house, and what children! Mrs. Davelock looked round her with blank despair; everything that could be smashed was broken, and dirt with disorder ruled the roost. It was a havoc such as an invading army might have left, while the children were literally dying through neglect.

'No more women for me,' remarked Mrs. Davelock, as she gathered up her skirts, rolled back her sleeves, and set to

work, weak though she was, with soap and water to scrub her children; they who used to be so pampered, well fed, and constantly bathed were now like emaciated skeletons. They had all been forced up in the cold mornings and made to work, and wait in the cold, and had borne it in silence, frightened lest their mother was dying.

It was a pitiful tale of cruelty and neglect which the delicate Katie revealed to her mother after the first impulsive burst of tears, when she was clasped to her heart again. How she had been dragged from her bed, though hardly able to stand, by the women Dirk thought were taking care of them, all mothers of children themselves. How cold and hungry she and the rest had been, and how they had to put themselves to sleep each night, threatened, if they told their father about anything, that they would be thrashed. Dirk felt his blood boiling with fury as he heard it all now that the hags were gone. It had been a veritable reign of terror, misery, and desolation.

But it was over, and they got back again to the fire, and had again enough to eat and drink, so were not long in forgetting their past affliction now that they had their mother once more to look after them.

wives, and told them that there was no good going to that chap, for he wasn't stuck up a bit, but as free with his fists as he had been with his coin. They decided to leave him alone for the future.

Dirk had not been in the house a month before the drains went all wrong; they had been going wrong before he took the house. One reason why the former landlord wanted to get rid of it. To repair them cost him about two quarters' rent, so that he began to find out that to be a house-owner wasn't all freedom from care.

A most harassing time was that drain-sorting, for it was the village Jack-of-all-trades who had it to do. And the young apprentice whom he sent to engineer it, raised not only three or four of the neighbours' gardens, which made them all turn *en masse* against this troublesome stranger who could not let things be, but nearly slaughtered the whole street with the villainous gases and perfumes which he liberated. It was a most awful fortnight, during which this bold youth dived below the surface of the earth and brought up bits of piping. But nothing to what they all suffered after this wily young necromancer had completed his unholy incantations, and the work was paid for. The drain had been stopped before, now it seemed as if ten thousand sewer demons had been let loose to wreak dire vengeance upon this doomed family.

Dirk remonstrated with Mr. Wilkings for not leaving the house in better order before he sold it, and Mr. Wilkings seemed touched a little with remorse, and inclined to bear his share in the expense of this fiend-liberating campaign; a weakness which his little sentimental and imaginative wife resolutely stood up against, vowing that the drains had all been lifted a fortnight before she had left and seen to properly. Dirk found that this was a daring lie on the part of the little woman, as was also her assurance that the chimneys had all been swept. But this the little one did not care one iota for, so long as she gained her point and managed to hoodwink her husband, who believed in her implicitly.

The winter had been a very severe one, but it was now drawing on towards spring, when Dirk set about improving his property and preparing for the summer. He got the village joiner to put up a swing for the children, and the

village jail-bird to turf the back and dig up and sort the other parts of the garden. It was a pleasant excitement for him to play at being a joiner, painter, and gardener; buying and planting fruit-trees and rose-bushes, which were fated never to grow. But that did not matter at the time, the pleasure lay in the planting, watering, and watching for the buds to appear. Dirk had no former experience about gardening, but he did wonder where all the worms and grubs came from, and how they managed to live so overcrowded, for with each spadeful of soil they wriggled and writhed out by the hundreds, large red and white worms, more like snakes than anything else that he had ever seen before.

Mrs. Pigott was also sorting her garden at the same time that he was. She was a frail-looking young woman, with a soft, undecided-looking, infantile face, and changeable manners. Sometimes she leaned over her fence and watched him sowing the flower-seeds, chatting amiably with him, and telling him all the village scandals, for with her sweet childish lisp, she had a very pretty way of insinuating all sorts of evil against people, and one of those whom she particularly abused was the landlady; with whom, however, she was on closest terms of intimacy. During these friendly half-hour chats she told Dirk that Mrs. Wilkings, instead of employing the sweep for the chimneys which he had paid for, had set them on fire. She also informed him that the cottages were the worst drained in the village, and that they stood on a perfect swamp, and that he was foolish to buy such a place—she wouldn't. Then she chuckled when she saw him look uneasy, and felt happy. When she was confidential she enlightened him about a great number of failings which he would never have found out for himself, to prove he was swindled on all sides.

'What did you pay Mr. Dagon for that spade of yours, Mr. Davelock?'

Dirk told her the price, when she exclaimed triumphantly: 'I thought so! See, here is one I bought yesterday from him, bigger and better than yours, which I only paid half the price for at the same shop, and which is the usual charge, except to fools. I wouldn't stand it if I were you.'

Then Dirk fell into the trap, and went over to the hardware shop, and made a mortal enemy of Mr. Dagon by

showing him that it was an overcharge, for in this instance she was right.

'That girl of yours, Mr. Davelock, just looks like a sister of mine that died,' she remarked, looking at white-faced Kate. 'I can see death written on her face.'

Or it would be: 'Ain't my two boys strong, Mr. Davelock? I felt just vexed for you the other day when I saw my boy and your Adrian going up the street together, mine bounding along so joyously, like a deer, and your boy crawling along like an old man.'

Sometimes of an evening her husband would come out for a smoke and join in the conversation.

'I expect now, that your business is an uncertain one?' said he; and Dirk admitted that it was rather.

'Yes, quite different from mine, you see. My screw is constant. We know exactly where we are.'

Then this fat-faced, squint-eyed young man would go round to the public-house, and while enjoying his glass of ale, would inform the others present that 'this Davelock was a desperately hard-up cove, for all his fine gentlemanly airs. He thinks hisself a gentleman, he does, with hardly one copper to rattle against the other.'

At other times, for some unexplained reason, both Mr. and Mrs. Pigott would ignore the presence of their neighbours. Dirk never knew when he was going to be cut dead when he saw them. They would keep up this state of 'strangers still' for perhaps a week at a stretch, during which time they flung their weeds and stones over to his side of the fence, while the two boys put out their tongues at his children, and showed by a great number of pantomimic ways that violent hatred was the order of the day. When they were friendly, they merely dragged his seeds through the fence to their side, and borrowed articles all the day long. When hostile they gave them their weeds and stones. Dirk did not quite know which state to like best; but, on the whole, preferred the labourer neighbours on the other side to this timber-yard idea of gentility.

However, it was a kind of study which interested him at his leisure moments, as he used to watch the different phases as they passed before him. Sometimes this young woman, who, by the way, he had thought to be an old woman when he

first saw her, for she had a very faded appearance when in *déshabille*, used to rush up and down the garden, throwing out her limbs like a cat before a change in the weather. She said that she could not keep still on these occasions, but must take it out in violent exercise. At other times she became very dejected and depressed; then she wanted the company and sympathy of all her neighbours, declaring that she would commit suicide if she did not get it. Dirk had seen these phases before, and put it down naturally to the great cause — firewater. She had come of a family of drunkards and semi-maniacs. Her father had often tried to end his life, and her husband used to say that he was afraid that his wife would do the same. This, after a little while, Dirk found to be the bond of sympathy between the landlady and her. They saw their husbands safely off each morning, then met in each other's house. 'I couldn't abear my 'usband at home all day long, as you do yours, Mrs. Davelock,' she would remark at times. Indeed, both women began to eye him with great suspicion and dislike, and tried to prejudice their husbands against him. 'He sees too much, he does,' they said to one another.

As the weather grew milder, the children got all out, while Dirk began to fix up arbours and lanes of trellis-work which he painted a lively green, and hoped to be able to train creepers over, as he wished to make the place rustic and comfortable for the summer. He also set to work papering and painting the house inside and out, while his wife and children watched with delight each new improvement.

Mr. and Mrs. Pigott and Mr. and Mrs. Wilkings also watched the progress with great interest and growing dislike. At first they shouted across mocking remarks about him mistaking his trade. Then, as they saw each coat of paint going on, they grew more silent and gloomy, almost bursting with envy, and for a full month after the house was done and ready for the summer, neither of them would speak to him, but became more frantically loving with each other, and contemptuous towards him. During this period of protracted huff, it was painful for Dirk to go out to water his flowers, for they made him, by their manner, feel as if he had injured them horribly.

Then they roused themselves up and began to imitate

as far as they possibly could, having only one consolation, which was, that neither Adrian or Katie looked as if the country agreed with them.

So the summer went on, a wet and chilly summer it was, with hardly a glimpse of the sun. The grasses and flowers grew up dankly and sickly, while a general unwholesomeness pervaded the air, and oppressed them all with malaria. Dirk, for the first time since that swamp experience, felt languid and disinclined to work, while his wife dragged herself about, without getting so strong as she might have done had she been able to get into the sun and fresh air.

The creepers and flowers which they had planted, also, fell over each other in a hopeless confusion, the stalks had no strength to support them, all was so slushy and miserable. Dirk gazed round his garden and trellis-work with dejection. The rose-bushes were eaten up as fast as they showed a leaf, by slugs and worms. Even nature seemed to join against them, and render all their efforts to be happy in vain.

The children were not thriving. They went to school to be ignored as strangers by the teachers, and abused by the children. All the village combined to show them that they were not wanted here, from the parents down to their white tom-cat. He was stoned whenever he went outside; while the starling gazed from his cage at the window, out upon that bleak rainy sky, and forgot all his other accomplishments, excepting the one sentence, 'Most extraordinary!' The children came one after another from school with various troubles, so that the cottage became like an hospital, with one or more always in bed.

Dirk and his wife bore their troubles bravely, and as they had always borne them, alone. Sometimes when Dirk went out to the village shops and would tell that another was ill, the villagers would look coldly as they listened; and he heard them say as he went out, 'They are always grumbling at something.'

Still, he had no cause to complain about his work. He had not now to go hunting far for patronage, and whatever he did on speculation, was accepted and praised up when it appeared. When he was able to work, his work was taken up readily by the Metaltown publishers; he was getting on by slow and sure degrees.

Sometimes, however, funds ran very low, and then they had an anxious week or two while waiting on more; when the butcher, baker, grocer, and milkman, looked at them with hardened stares, and forgot to touch their hats. Then Dirk felt ashamed to walk down the village, and hung his head like a criminal; and Mrs. Wilkings and her friends looked elated and happy.

Times these were when they felt how wretched it was to be poor; when they were put to great shifts to raise money for parcels, postage stamps, and train money, knowing that no help could be expected anywhere, and trying to hide their extremity. At these times Dirk felt inclined to curse his brains and wish that he had been born a field labourer, without a single aspiration beyond his beer, for these labourers looked careless, if not happy, over their lot.

Adrian, the pale and studious-looking one, who could say such quaint things, and draw so cleverly and nervously, with his thin legs, seemed never to grow any bigger. Katie, the cleverest and bravest, as well as the most beautiful of their flock, who could hold her own so well with the haters, and give back scorn for scorn; who had the patience of a woman in learning anything, and was such a little housewife that no task beat her, was growing weaker every day, although her brave spirit would not own it. 'I am quite well, mamma, quite well,' she would say impatiently, and then gasp for breath when she thought she was alone.

It was all so pitiful, so like the afflictions of Job, long drawn out, and without termination. As soon as Dirk gained a step, something that he valued as much gave way within his hand. Like to the accursed Dutchman battling against his awful fate, he seemed as if he never would get his ship past the Cape. What was the use of empty applause to him, who had no one to listen to it, except with hatred, if it would not bring to him the means to save the lives of those he loved best, and who seemed to be stealing from him one by one?

Mrs. Rosebud had finished her career as far as the street was concerned, for which Dirk felt sorry, as she was the only one from whom he could extract a little amusement; the rest were all uniformly dull and monotonous in their sullen dislike and envy.

Mrs. Rosebud had a comparatively quiet spell for a week or so after that last interview; her temper getting the better of her sometimes, when she would stand at her gate and revile all creation in a well-chosen stock of rich expletives, or dance around, pulling hair and skin from her pious, meek little husband, or from any of the neighbours who chanced to be handy to her at the moment. Dirk often observed the meek little man go past to his Salvation meetings rather the worse of the wear. However, he found out that his reckless wife was one of the proud boasts of this convert soldier, which he would not have wanted for a small fortune. She was his daily cross which he was proud to bear, and who gave him plenty of evidences to show off to his comrades of her weight and nails.

On the occasion of her being lost sight of she had been extra vexed, he having been in more constant work than usual, so that the long-necked bottle made a great many more journeys to the 'Golden Bull' than on ordinary occasions; while in the camp the warriors, male and female, had great reason to rejoice. Their comrade showed a fresh score of Satan's marks each time he put in his appearance; in fact, it seemed as if he would be a flayed hero before long, so that they blew their trumpets lustily and hammered away at the tambourines and big drum. Satan wasn't nearly dead yet while Mrs. Rosebud lived.

She got more vexed as the days went on, until at last she reached a climax of temper; when, after laying most of his male friends *hors de combat* with broken heads, and smashing all her own crockery in small pieces, she finished up the evening's amusement by nearly biting the nose from the face of the policeman, when he came to remonstrate with her for her extra energy. That night and for many more she slept in a house where her temper was of no use to any one, and had employment at picking oakum to keep her mind occupied; while her poor man went about with drooping head, not knowing what subject to take for his evening's discourse, now that she was 'laid up.' As he remarked tearfully, 'No one can know how much I miss my Polly.'

CHAPTER XIV

KATIE

ABOUT a week after the incarceration of the gay and festive Rosebud, the Davelocks woke up one morning to find themselves in a state of high flood.

It reminded Dirk somewhat of his colonial experience, and gave the children great delight to watch the waters as they lapped about their front gate and sapped the foundations. The street looked like a Dutch canal, with the banks on the opposite side sloping into the stream, a picturesque scene while it lasted, with the horses and carts swimming over the hollow parts and wading up to their waists over the rest of the road, and the boys making rafts of floating planks and oars of loose rails.

Katie had been ailing again for about three weeks. Nothing much, she said, only a desire to stay in her bed all the time. She never wanted to get up, but used to sit propped by pillows, and work all day long at some neat thing or other, if she wasn't reading. She had not been to school much lately, as the doctor had said on his last visit not to send her. But for all that she was far forward for her age, for she read a great deal, and spelling out the difficult words, asked the meaning of them as she went along. All sorts of books she read; tales of adventures and the sort of literature that boys like best. She did not care much for girls' stories; they were all made so sly and hypocritical, she said, and did and said such silly baby things, that they made her fairly savage with their aggravating ways. Helen Montgomery in the *Wide, Wide World*, was a self-conceited, disgusting brat, whom she would have thrashed soundly had she been her aunt; and all the other goody girls were awful fools, and neither worth writing nor reading about. Now

the boys' stories were different; the heroes did not go fooling about, but liked to stand up and fight it out with their tyrants. That was what she liked, people who struck back again when they were wronged; when she was injured in any way, that's what she always did herself.

One day when she had been at school, she had seen some boys strike her little brother; without a pause she dashed amongst the crowd of bullies and hit them right and left, until they all ran away from the brave little white-faced girl.

But although so fiery-tempered and warlike when she was offended, she was most winsome and cuddling in her engaging ways when she was pleased or wished to please any one. She could wind herself round their hearts before they knew where they were, and get all that she wanted without hardly an effort on her part, while her elder sister was standing shyly by wondering how she was to begin. Katie was the fascinator of the family, with her big heart ever at her mouth at any tale of distress, and her little fists ready to clench at any tale of wrong.

Once she had gone along to Mrs. Wilkings to see her, and take as a present one of her paintings of flowers. That lady didn't know the little maiden whom she was trying to probe, and finished herself up when she remarked, 'Your mamma is much older than your papa, isn't she?'

'No,' answered Katie indignantly. 'Mamma is much younger than papa.'

'Is she, indeed? I'd have taken her for fifty.'

'How many years older are you than Mr. Wilkings?' asked the maiden, fixing her large grey eyes steadfastly upon the shifty orbs of the other.

'Goodness gracious, child! you don't think I am nearly as old as my 'usband, do you?' almost screamed the fox, caught in her own trap.

'I thought you were, you know, because you look so much older.'

After that passage-of-arms in which the child won, they both hated one another with equal fervency, for Katie never forgave an insult paid to her father or mother.

Two or three weeks before the flood, Katie had been playing outside, when the milkman's dog sprang up and bit

her on the hand. It bled a good deal, but she did not tell her mother about it, for she did not want to frighten her; she told her sister, but made her promise not to tell. All through that day and the next the brave heart brooded upon it, for she had read about hydrophobia; but on the third day she could stand the fear no longer and went to her mother.

'What would you do, mamma, if a dog bit you?' she asked quietly.

'Oh, I think I would bathe it with vinegar and water.'

'That's quite right, mamma; but would you be afraid of the bite?'

'Yes, horribly, and particularly if the dog was a vicious one.'

'Well, the milkman's dog bit me the day before yesterday, and I bathed it at once with vinegar and water as you would have done, but I don't think he is a vicious dog, yet I feel a little afraid.'

The mother anxiously examined the wound and sent Dirk to see the dog. It was a quiet enough dog, and had only snapped the hand by accident in its eagerness to get a biscuit which she had offered to it, so that they did not feel very anxious about the result. Yet it had been a shock to the little maid's system, so that next day she was unable to rise, and the mother thought the rest would do her good. She was neither better nor worse than she had been many times before, and as they had both the Applewait and Metaltown doctor's prescription they did not think it needful to call in any other doctor, so after soothing Katie over, and telling her not to be afraid of the bite, they took her into their own bedroom where they could watch over her. Very soon she recovered her wonted spirits, and lay working away at her drawing, or her knitting, and joining in their conversation at nights, like a little woman. She was so old-fashioned in all her ways that they could never speak to her as a child.

But early one morning Dirk was awoke by his wife touching him softly, and on looking up he saw her stooping over her child with her dark eyes filled with horror and woe. One look was enough; their darling still lay breathing, but with the grey shadow of death upon her lovely face.

'Oh, my God!' he moaned as he sprung up.

'Hush, hush! and go for a doctor.'

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'Oh, my God!' he moaned as he sprung up.

'Hush, hush! and go for a doctor.'

He staggered out of the house. Which doctor could he get that he could trust? Fate decided the question, for the first man he met was Dr. Addit returning from an early case.

'Quick, doctor, I think my daughter is dying.'

The mortal agony on Dirk's face silenced even the native coarseness of this doctor, so that he held his tongue and followed him into the house and up to where the little maid lay with her mother beside her, watching the still face and the cracked blue lips from which the breath hardly issued.

Dr. Addit looked on the child calmly for a moment and then slightly shrugged his shoulders.

'Have you got any brandy in the house?'

Dirk brought the brandy, with his teeth chattering, and handed it to Dr. Addit, who began to administer it by teaspoonfuls, while the father and mother fell on their knees, as David did of old, crying out, 'Oh, God, in mercy spare us this child.' Did He hear that united and heart-wrung cry? The doctor gave them no hope, but continued to watch, while they wrestled in prayer with the Angel of Death to go away.

Slowly the grey shadow passed away as the morning light grew in the sky, and the passing soul came back to that wearied body to struggle anew against destiny, while the parents, almost feeling guilty in their selfish love, thus to stand and dispute with a presence so grand and still, yet by the strength of their passion drawing it back from that sacred couch. Selfish, yes, they knew then and afterwards that they were to blame for those impious wishes, but who could help it at such an hour?

It was a miracle, and so even the doctor felt, as, after a couple of hours' watching, he crept out of the room.

'She may live yet, since she has lasted so long; but surely any mother could have seen this coming on.'

He could not help the rebuke, even although a little subdued; but the mother only looked at her darling and never heard him.

In another hour the whole village knew that Katie lay dying, and some of the labourers' wives came to offer their help; amongst these came the young wife who had been with them the first day. Mrs. Davelock took her offer to look after the children, while Dirk and she waited in the bedroom.

But Mrs. Wilkings did not come with either sympathy or offer of help. The children of the labourers crept past to school, casting frightened glances in, and the only children who played as usual about the doors were those of their neighbour Pigott, who had Tommy along to help them in their fun.

Once in the day Dirk went out to the door, as the doctor had ordered perfect quiet, to silence the three boys who were running out and in shouting. He saw Mrs. Pigott standing looking on at them with a pleased smile upon her baby face.

'Will you kindly keep your children quiet to-day, Mrs. Pigott? Katie is very, very ill.'

The young woman turned upon him with a fixed stare and replied loudly:—

'Who are you, or your Katie, that I should spoil my children's sport for, I wonder?—Here, Charley, take the penny I promised you and get the trumpet you were wanting.'

Then the savage turned into her house, muttering, 'Keep quiet, will I? Yes, I will soon show you how quiet I can keep!'

She was in one of her devilish moods, as Dirk saw, so he thought it best to leave her alone. Shortly afterwards they were greeted with thunderous smashing on the stairs and walls. This young matron had taken the axe and was hammering all over the place, without any other motive except to annoy them and show her independence, while her boy stood at the open door and blew upon his penny trumpet.

The woman was half mad with drink and reasonless fury, or surely she would have thought for a moment; still Dirk felt, as he listened to the plaster falling inside the laths, as if he would have to rush out and strangle her. At last, maddened with the fearful din, he went round to the landlady and asked her, if she was a woman at all, to come and stop it before too late.

'My daughter's life depends upon perfect quiet just now, Mrs. Wilkings.'

'I cannot interfere with our tenant, Mr. Davelock.'

'If you don't, I must get the policeman to put a stop to it.'

Then frightened at that threat, Mrs. Wilkings went to her friend and remonstrated.

'My dear, you are just going a little bit too far.'

'Not a bit of it,' shouted the other. 'Why should I study the like o' him?' and then she went on more uproariously.

Doctor Addit came in just in the middle of the devilish row, and said, 'Hallo, what's all this? Do you know it will kill your daughter?'

'I cannot help it, doctor, she won't keep still.'

'Then you must go and send round the policeman.'

However, before the guardian of the peace had time to get round, for Dirk went promptly for him, the termagant had exhausted herself and fallen asleep; then they had a slight interval of quiet, with the exception of the tin-trumpet music.

'I tell you what it is, Davelock, you are in the wrong quarter here. If your girl pulls through, you must get her out without delay. I wouldn't live beside such a born devil for a fortune!'

Slowly the day passed, and their prayer was answered; Katie got the turn and once more began to mend. Then as soon as Dirk heard there was a slight hope, he sent for Mr. Wilkings. He was a cold, emotionless, and colourless man, of about thirty, but looking younger than his years—one of these silent men, with chilly grey eyes, who look almost intellectual, yet are in reality thorough simpletons.

'I hear that your daughter is a little better to-night.'

'Yes, Mr. Wilkings, but no thanks to your tenant.'

Mr. Wilkings did not reply; he had been coached up by his vindictive wife for a storm.

'I have sent for you to-night to speak about the house Are your tenants next door going to stay?'

'I don't quite know, but I hope so.'

'Ah! well, you remember our arrangement when taking it; it is now almost a year, and I want to give it up.'

'Why?'

'Because my daughter's life depends upon it.'

'I heard that you had been complaining about a slight noise to-day, the driving in of a nail, or something of that kind.'

'No, Mr. Wilkings, I do not complain about the driving in

of a nail. I refer to the malicious attempt made to-day by Mrs. Pigott to cause my daughter's death. But I will keep to the question, will you free me from my bargain?'

Mr. Wilkings had wanted them away for a long time. His wife had harped upon the subject so long, that he thought it would be a good move if he could force Dirk out after all the improvements had been done.

'I don't remember any bargain that I made about a twelvemonth, but I am quite willing to let you off, if made worth my while. What are your conditions?'

'That I pay up the twelvemonth and burn the papers.'

'I'll let you know to-morrow.' And Mr. Wilkings went home to consult his wife, as all dutiful husbands ought to do.

Next morning Dirk got a letter inserted into his letter-box. Under the direction of his wife, Mr. Wilkings had composed what he considered to be an insulting and cutting missive. It stated that as Dirk had made himself obnoxious to his neighbours, the writer would be glad to learn how quickly he could deliver up the keys.

Dirk laughed as he read this insulting and foolish dismissal, it played so nicely into his hands.

'When do you think we dare move Katie?' he asked the doctor when he called.

'Next week, if she gets no worse.'

So Dirk wrote a reply, saying he would clear out in a fortnight. His ownership had come to an abrupt close, but he did not regret all the money and trouble which he had spent upon the house and ground, now that his little girl had a chance for her life. That was too great a joy for any paltry annoyance to interfere with or cloud.

Slowly Katie passed out of the dark valley, getting stronger day after day. By God's great grace she would be spared to them a little time yet.

So in a fortnight's time they were able to move into a larger and, as Dirk thought, a better house, and shake the dust, or rather the mud, of this unholy street from their feet for ever.

CHAPTER XV

NEAR THE CLOSE OF THE YEAR

THERE have been many discussions going on in the papers lately about good and bad luck. Many people ridicule the idea as grossly superstitious; others, again, and amongst this class rank many of our hardest thinkers, believe in it. The present writer is not a particularly hard thinker, and yet he has been forced to number himself with the believers in luck.

The house which Dirk fixed upon was an unlucky house, as his star was at present unlucky, although nothing about its appearance suggested this, for it looked the lightest, cheeriest, and best regulated house in the whole village of Pearstone. It was too new for ghosts as yet to haunt it, having had only six years of existence. But these six years had not been lucky years for the landlord, for four of the six years it had stood empty, although the rent was moderate enough, and for the remaining two years, the three tenants who had occupied it had left without paying their rent or rates. As yet the landlord had not seen the colour of money for his unlucky property. So that although no dead men's ghosts haunted it, ghosts of unpaid rates and taxes hovered about the letter-box, to perplex and trouble the next unlucky tenant.

The first letter which Mrs. Davelock received in the new house was the black-edged intimation card of the death of her mother at the village of Applewait. The second post brought the news of the rejection of one of Dirk's articles. So sure had he been about this being accepted, that he had depended upon it paying his doctor's bill, with some past accounts which he owed to the village tradesmen.

Then other bad news came. It seemed that since he had

left the cottage all his good fortune in business of late was flying from him. Yet Katie was gaining strength every day, so that he did not grieve so utterly over the other losses. He had still a pound or two left, and something might turn up before this quite melted away.

Then death came into their midst in a way that he did not expect.

One day, while sorting up their new place, the woman who was helping them to tidy up left the door of the starling's cage open, and upon Mrs. Davelock going into the kitchen a few moments afterwards, she discovered 'Dicky' in 'Snodjy's' mouth, and a little grey cat which belonged to the next door running away guiltily.

'Snodjy,' as soon as he observed his mistress, released the foolish victim, who had, like too many other captives, sought the unknown to have cause to regret his curiosity. He was wounded, but not dead, when they restored him to his cage, and could still gasp out his one expression of astonishment, 'Most extraordinary!' while it was an open question whether 'Snodjy' had rescued him from the talons of the grey stranger or pounced upon his old friend himself, and no one could explain the exact position of affairs. He released him willingly, which was something in 'Snodjy's' favour. Still, he had been caught in the crime. Afterwards they were inclined to think that they had wronged poor 'Snodjy,' and that in reality he had been acting the part of a protector to the starling, but for the moment they were all very angry with him, and drove him outside.

'Snodjy' felt that he was condemned, and, being of a proud disposition, stayed outside all day in the back-yard, with downcast head, while 'Dicky' sat on his perch and panted for breath, as the dauntless Katie sometimes did among her pillows.

All forenoon and afternoon, Dicky sat on his perch without trying to dress his ruffled feathers, or make a single observation. He was thinking out the problem of that outside world, which he had, as they had, found to be such a cruel and bitter one; and in the yard the white outcast, 'Snodjy,' sat, with all his pluck taken out of him by their harsh reproaches and unforgiving looks, amongst the stranger cats, who gathered round him, and tried to aggravate him into fighting. On

ordinary occasions he would have faced up to the fight willingly, for he was a noble 'Tom.' But this day he merely mewed a pitiful protest, as if he had other matters to brood upon, and gave way before their hostile advances. Once they saw him fairly driven to bay by the badgering of three well-fed tom-cats. Then he turned round with arching back and raised tail, and drove them valiantly back, but he did not seek to follow up his advantage, but sank again upon his haunches on the moist earth, and buried his large sagacious head between his forepaws, as a dog sometimes sits when he is thinking.

Towards evening 'Dicky' began to chatter and recall some of his old accomplishments. He tried the flying and cawing of crows on the wing, the purling of water into a basin, hushed the dead baby, Bell, to sleep with 'Whisty-whisty! along with variations on the word 'extraordinary.' They took him up to their bedroom that night, and left 'Snodjy' in the cold as a punishment. When they fell asleep the bird was still talking and muttering away to himself, but getting very incoherent and mixed up in his sentences. In the last words which they heard, he seemed to have forgotten the final syllable of his exclamation, and as if he was making languid efforts to remember, he muttered constantly, in a low monotonous tone, 'Most ex—ex—extra—most extra—extra—ord—most extraord—' He could not get past that, but went back once more to the beginning and over it again and again without being able to finish the word.

Next morning all was quiet and still in the wicker-work cage, with the perches empty. It was a Sunday morning, clear and frosty, with a white rime over everything, for it was now the month of October. Dirk knew what had come to them during the night, yet he went over to be sure of the misfortune. Yes, 'Dicky,' their companion and lively friend of nine years, who had seen most of the children born and grow up, lay on his back, with folded wings and outstretched legs, in the bottom of the cage, stiff and cold!

A moment of misery filled his heart at this dreary spectacle, to be succeeded by a burst of rage against the criminal, 'Snodjy,' who had slain this friend. Half-dressing himself, he ran downstairs and into the back garden to execute vengeance against the murderer. Yes, he was still there,

as they had seen him the night before, with his big white head between his paws, waiting upon his punishment mutely amidst that surrounding of white hoar frost.

The wretch! Dirk rushed upon him to catch hold of him, never doubting but what he would run when he saw him coming. But the cat never moved; and then Dirk paused with consternation in his heart, put down his hand and touched the drooping head to find it ice-cold and immovable. 'Snodjy' had paid his debt, like a hero, and had been dead for hours.

Can the hearts of animals burst with grief, as they say the heart of man will sometimes do? If so, then this last true and dumb friend had died of a broken heart. They were all gone now. 'Tweed,' the dog who had vanished so mysteriously without ever leaving a single trace behind. 'Dicky,' the bird, over whom they were weeping upstairs. And now this gentle white hero, who had only failed them once, if he had not been unjustly accused, sitting like a martyr amongst that hoar frost, damp and icy.

The friends were all gone, leaving them alone in this uncertainty and poverty, friendless. Dirk took up the stiff body and carried it inside, observing, as he did so, two drops of watery blood standing congealed at the nostrils.

That day, while the cracked and discordant church bells sounded for the benefit of the church-goers, they dug a grave in the garden, and buried them both together—the dead starling, and his murderer or *defender*, 'Snodjy.'

CHAPTER XVI

A BITTER CHRISTMASTIDE

IT was a hard and stern winter in more respects than one, for the cold weather set in quickly and bound everything up hard and fast. Money was desperately scarce, for although Dirk had some due to him at different places, still he could not present his accounts until his contributions appeared, as that would be to confess his poverty, the very worst policy he could have pursued if he wished to be respected and employed in future. The world does not give its commissions to those who mostly require it. It hates to be bothered with dunning accounts, and feels naturally inclined to despise and turn its broad back upon the needy.

He was in debt with Dr. Howler Addit and the local tradesmen, and had to go down at the end of each week and apologise humbly for keeping them waiting; debts which were increasing as the weeks slid past, until it seemed as if he would never get out of it.

The tax-men had called and bullied him once or twice, then finally sent him summonses. These he had to meet, and in order to do so, he had been forced to pawn his watch and his wife's trinkets. Every week, while he waited on these tardy magazines, he had to make up and take in a bundle of what they could spare to the pawnbroker to keep them going on. Gradually their trunks were becoming emptied, and his pocket-book filled with pledge-tickets. Oh! the degradation of those weekly visits, and the bitterness of his return home with the few shillings which he had been able to raise on these home treasures. Mr. Moloch was being revenged properly whether he knew it or not; still, wine and brandy had to be procured at whatever cost for Katie; and so personal dignity had to be disregarded.

These were bitter months during which Dirk could have given up the struggle gladly, but for that heroic woman and those helpless little ones. Often his fingers lingered tenderly and wistfully upon the laudanum phial, which he had to keep in the house for earache and spasms, as he thought how easily it could all be finished up. Then he would replace it on the shelf, and kneeling down, ask God to forgive him for his selfish promptings. They had no friends now on earth, and no acquaintances to speak to, so in a savage impulsive way he spoke directly to God, asking Him sometimes how long the wrath was to press upon him. He had never been very attentive to church duties, and was less now, for his clothes were growing too shabby to appear at church. But there was hardly a moment, day or night, that he did not pour out his heavy heart to his Maker, and lay his weary burden before Him for inspection. He prayed and implored constantly and passionately to those brassy gates to open and this long dark night to pass away.

Revenge was dead, with ambition. All that he now asked for was to be able to live and pay his debts, growing so fast and so hopelessly large. Bitter debts they were, as debt always is. Dr. Howler Addit's was the worst, for he met him constantly and had to hang his head as he passed him with shame, while the other lorded it over him coarsely and contemptuously each time he met him. The young man felt glad that it was not paid up, as it gave him the opportunity to insult him, while in his own mind he felt pretty confident that it would be paid some time. He also owed Hodge Hinderlans for some money this prudent friend had advanced on the voyage home, and which he had never been able to refund. Hodge sometimes reminded him about it by letter or when they met, but to his honour it must be said that he had waited most patiently. He was not a bad sort to those in adversity who did not attempt to rival him, and during these months of needy adversity, when boots broke down and coals ran short, Dirk felt too low-spirited to attempt to rival any one.

Glowing notices about him appeared in papers from all parts on his former work, and this was the grand mockery of his daily life. People would read them and envy him his popularity, while he was sitting with his anxious wife at home

penniless. The Davelocks had made up their minds not to cultivate any more intimacy with neighbours in their new house after their past experience at the cottage, but they did not find this an easy matter when the neighbours were disposed to speak to them. However, they managed, by keeping as much indoors as possible, to avoid becoming too friendly; they were quite content with civility and no more. Then after a little time when the news spread through the village that they were hard up, the neighbours, who had been inclined to be effusive at first, drew in their horns and became reserved, which suited all parties under the present circumstances best.

So the snows, and hard frosts, and depressing rains and fogs—all which go to constitute the misery of an English winter—passed over their devoted heads, and Christmas was drawing near.

The children were constantly talking about the approaching visit of Santa Claus and preparing for the coming of the venerable old gentleman, while Dirk and his wife thought how they were going to manage so as not to disappoint their little ones, who believed so thoroughly in this good fairy.

Katie, who was a little wise woman in most things, and hard to hoodwink, believed in this myth the most implicitly. They often wondered as they listened to her talk if it was pretence on her part, or reality, for of late most of the delusions of life had been ruthlessly torn from all their eyes, old and young alike. But if the little maid doubted at all, she must have shut her heart against the doubt, for she talked the most constantly about it, and worked almost incessantly and in secret at her Christmas gifts.

'You see, Bertha, papa has not much money just now, so I don't like to ask him for what he owes me. I'll make all your presents, and you'll see they are nice ones when you get them.'

Brave and secretive little maid; for six long weeks before Christmas she laboured at her presents when alone, hiding them away when any one appeared, and whistling as she worked in bed, happy in the anticipation of the surprise in store for them when Christmas came. As each present was completed, she wrapped it carefully in tissue paper, and put it in a box on the top of the wardrobe, which her sister Bertha handed down to her, and put up again without daring to look.

The others worked also at painting cards and making little presents, but they could not guard their secret as she could hers, but used to give their parents surreptitious peeps now and again as they went on.

Katie was the most orderly and methodical maiden in the world. Any money that she got, or earned, for sometimes her father or mother used to purchase her drawings from her, she kept in a little bag. And although quite ready to lend it out, she was very careful to keep a debtor and creditor account of it all. Her brothers and sisters were all at this time more or less in her debt, but her poor father the most of all.

Sometimes when flagged out he used to fling himself down beside her, and say: 'Will you give me a pennyworth of stroking to-day, Katie?' He dearly loved to feel the thin little hand pass over his face and through his hair. Then Katie would turn about and stroke him so softly and tenderly; how he would have missed that dear little stroker if he had lost her at the cottage. While she lived he could not think God to be too hard upon him, no matter what he had to suffer.

'Do you think that will be a good pennyworth, papa, for I am getting a little tired?'

'More than a penny, Katie; I think that ought to be marked down as twopence worth.'

'Oh, no, I'll only charge a penny.'

'Well, you see, Katie, as you will have to mark it down against me, I think you had best make it twopence for the long credit; that is how the grocer and the doctor work their accounts, and you ought to do the same.'

Then, after much pressing, she would put down twopence to the already long account which he owed her.

'You are owing me five shillings, do you know, papa, and this will make it five and twopence.'

'Am I, though? I'll have to look careful or I shall go bankrupt.'

She had no compunction at writing down her father's debt. He could easily afford it by and by. But with her mother it was different. She trusted to her memory, and left the columns blank under the heading, 'Money owing by mamma.'

She was very proud and sensitive, and with those she disliked used to sit silent and never say a word. She did not like Dr. Howler Addit, for he made no effort to win her good opinion, and it was only after great persuasions on the part of her mother that she would see him at all on the occasions of his visits. One day when he ordered her to loosen her night-dress to get herself sounded, she resisted for a long time, and when at last she yielded, it was with a look of shameful agony, such as a modest full-grown woman might have shown.

'I hate him,' she said, when he went out.

Dr. Addit was positive at first that her trouble was consumption. 'Both lungs completely gone,' he said. Then he looked doubtful after a time and said it was 'worms,' for which he gave her strong powders. He ordered her mother at first to give her as much beef and mutton as she could stuff into her—'half a chicken if she can eat it.' Then forgetting what he had ordered, he pretended to be horrified at the chicken leg which her mother was giving her, and said, 'Surely you are not going to give the child all that?'

After handing them the powders with directions when to give them, he left saying he would call and see the effect they had upon her, but thinking that he had given Dirk quite enough of his services until he was paid up, and feeling no interest in his pretty little quaint patient, he did not call any more. As he passed the door every day, they began to feel that since *he* had given them up, the danger to their darling was over; began to feel hopeful, and plan out where they would all go in the spring-time. Some days Katie would dress herself and come down for an hour or two beside them, thin and frail-looking, but lovely enough, only she used to beg her sister to lend her her slippers, as her boots felt too heavy.

So December drew on and Dirk began to think what he could spare most so as to raise enough money for Santa Claus, for he determined that this would be a nice Christmas for them all, to celebrate the coming to life again of their little girl.

Then a wonderful thing happened. One morning, three days before Christmas, the postman brought to him a registered letter, and upon opening it, he discovered a cheque

for six pounds with a letter from a stranger, who told Dirk that he had owed his father money which he had lent him thirty years before, and which he never had been able to return to him during his lifetime. Lately, hearing that he had a son, he thought to pay what he could afford of his debt to him.

This letter with enclosure astonished as well as delighted Dirk. Then there were some honest men in the world left, and God had not quite forsaken them after all.

'Hurrah, children! we'll be able to have a merry Christmas this year, after all.'

Then there were great rejoicings in the Davelock family. They set about preparing for the event, getting their holly and mistletoe up on the walls, Katie helping with the others to decorate her parents' bedroom; for since her last illness they feared to let her out of their sight for a moment.

Katie for months had been strangely anxious to have this a nice Christmas.

'I would not like to die before Christmas was over, Bertha,' she would say quite cheerfully to her big sister; 'but if I thought that by dying I could change papa's bad luck, I would ask God to take me where I could watch over them after it was all over.'

Had the little maiden been making stipulations with God, and signing a contract with the Almighty, her pure young life for her father and mother's? Who knows?

'You see, Bertha, I am not of much use to papa and mamma here, but up there I know that I could be. I will tell you what I'd do. I'd go straight up to Jesus, as He sat on His white throne, and ask Him to help papa and mamma out of their trouble. But a day or two would not matter, so I should like to stay till after Christmas.'

On Christmas Eve Dirk brought all their presents in quietly and began to stuff the stockings with them, the children going to bed early and keeping their eyes shut until they fell asleep. That afternoon had been a busy one, for their mother was having a huge baking, at which they all watched her eagerly, Katie with the others, a bright eager light in her blue eyes.

'Oh, how I wish to-morrow would come! I never thought it was so hard to keep a secret before. But I have such lovely

things for you, and you will say that I have been clever, for I made them all out of my own head, and from what I saw long ago in shop windows. I do think mine are as nice as if I had bought them.'

'Far better, Katie, I know, for there is no one like you for picking up the way of doing things quickly.'

Katie could hardly keep her secret on that last night, she had guarded it so long and closely. However, at last, bed-time came, and she went in by herself so as to be asleep soon. When her father and mother looked at her as she lay asleep, they saw that she had folded her hands together as if in prayer, while a sweetly conscious smile lingered on her lips. She wanted to let Father Christmas see when he came that she was a happy contented girl.

It was hardly daybreak the next morning when they were woke by Katie crying out: 'Oh, mamma and papa, wake up, I can keep it no longer, a merry Christmas to you both.'

'God bless you, darling—a happy Christmas to you.'

'Now hand me down my box. Ah, at last, at last the happy moment has arrived!'

Her blue eyes were blazing with excitement, and her little hands trembling as she untied the box and produced her presents.

'Here's a pen-wiper for papa. I made it out of bits of coloured rag. A scarlet hood for you, mamma, and a needle-case. Then there are a couple of worsted balls for Jocelyn and Adrian, with a pair of knitted reins to play horses with. A pin-cushion for Bertha; and, better than all, they only cost me twopence the lot for the stuff—am I clever and useful, mamma?'

'Clever isn't the word; you are a perfect genius,' said both her parents, astonished at what they saw.

'Then kiss me, my dear old darlings, for I love you so much, and I am so happy to-day.'

It was a happy day, the happiest they had spent together for many a long month, for Katie was there beside them, and looking better than she had done for a long long time. They all had dinner together, and after dinner their mother sang and played to them.

'Sing "Cock Robin" and "The Mistletoe Bough," mamma, I like them the best.'

Then her mother sang to her again and again; and after a happy evening, they all went off to bed.

Next day when they woke again, Katie said she felt a little tired, and thought that she would take a rest in bed. 'Would mamma stay beside her for a little and take her breakfast in bed along with her?'

'Yes, if you like, my pet,' said her mother, and Dirk went downstairs and made breakfast for them. After breakfast their mother got up and went about her household duties, looking up occasionally to see how her little lass was getting on. There she sat up in bed singing the first line of 'Mistletoe Bough,' as she tried her new paint-box, and asking to be left alone for a bit because she had something to do by herself.

'How do you feel, my darling?'

'Just a little tired, mamma, but I have no pain anywhere, only my head feels a little heavy.'

'Yesterday's dinner must not have agreed with you. Shall I send for the doctor?'

'No, mamma, I won't see him.'

'Very well; only don't tire yourself out.'

'Do you know, mamma, I had such a beautiful dream last night, all about jewels. I thought the room was filled with them, and that the sky opened and I saw Jesus surrounded by angels—all so bright, with their shining faces and glittering wings. Heaven must be a lovely place!'

'Ah!' replied the mother, 'I am glad that you had a nice dream, for I had a nasty one. I thought I saw a lot of ugly black toads, and one of them jumped on my back and would not be shaken off.'

'That was the nightmare, mamma, and means nothing.'

She looked no worse than she had been often before. One day well and exerting herself, and the next day tired out; therefore the mother did not feel any great anxiety about her state on this day; a rest would be all she required.

That night, while Dirk sat in the parlour working by lamplight, Mrs. Davelock took a book and began to read it while she waited for Katie to fall asleep.

'That is a nice book you have, mamma,' the little one observed. '*The Strange Story*. I have read it all and could tell it to you, only I feel a little breathless to-night.'

'I would rather read it myself; you try to fall asleep.'

'I think I will take our Katie up to Metaltown as soon as she can travel, and get the advice of some specialist there,' said Dirk, as he came up once to see them and stretch himself, quite easy in his mind as regarded the little one.

By and by, as the night advanced, Katie grew restless, and tossed from side to side, unable to go to sleep.

'Oh! I am so tired, mamma, so awfully tired, but I cannot sleep, and I wish I could.'

'Try, Katie, or I'll have to send for the doctor.'

'No, no, not him; I hate him.'

'Shall I put a cold-water cloth upon your head?'

'No, mamma, but put your hand; ah, that is nice, my darling, my darling.'

What a mouthful of affection she made of the words, 'my darling,' she had such a wealth of love in her for her mother.

'In a little while she started suddenly, saying impatiently, 'Quick, mamma, quick, take that black cloth from my eyes, I can't see while it is there.'

'Oh, my God! Dirk! Dirk!' shrieked out the poor mother, a sudden horror taking possession of her as she heard the ominous words. A wild shriek it was which brought Dirk from his work with a rush.

He was beside them both, but only in time. Seizing his daughter up in his arms, and bending his face over her pretty mouth, he caught her last gasp, and with it her flying soul in that passionate kiss.

'Run, darling, quick, and get the doctor; I'll hold her until you come back.' He said this because he wanted his poor wife away for a time, although he knew well that no doctor on earth could bring that angel back now. She had gone on her dark journey, having made the sacrifice, to ask Jesus to help them, seeing that they could not help themselves.

BOOK FOURTH

MORNING

CHAPTER I

THE NEW YEAR

IT was New Year's Day in Pearstone and all the landscape lay covered with a heavy sheet of snow. It was the touch of that grand old painter, Winter, over everywhere, which made even commonplace and ugly Pearstone almost passable as a picture. White hung from the telegraph wires, while every branch seemed weighted down with the lovely, alabaster-tinted load. It looked as if each tree, shrub, or even bare building-pole was cut out of and fringed with frosted silver and filigree work, a universal scene of purity and sadness.

Dirk sat in the parlour which had not been swept nor dusted for a week, with the black cinders and grey ashes in the fireplace as they had been left since that fatal Boxing night. On the walls drooped the withered and dust-laden wreaths of holly and mistletoe which the buried fingers had so tastefully put up. He sat alone with his empty pipe in his lips, looking at nothing, thinking of nothing; passive and dazed with his overwhelming affliction.

Upstairs in the bedroom his wife lay on her back upon a bed which had not been made for days, with her arm laid over her unwashed face, and hiding her hollow, dry and burning eyes from the accursed light of day. In the other room the children crouched together, shivering and whimpering with cold and hunger, and but for these piteous sounds, not another sound broke the deathly stillness of this house of desolation.

They had come to the end of their resources and desires; the coals were all used up, all their money gone, everything which could be carried away had been pawned and spent. For four days neither father nor mother had tasted a bite—no great hardship to them, since they had no inclination to eat, and now the children were gnawing the last dry crust between them and starvation.

Dirk had given up the struggle at last. He could not any longer pray to a God who seemed to have played with their hearts and lives as a cat does with a mouse. He was waiting on the brokers to come and drive them out to the beautiful but pitiless frost and snow, and after that—surcease.

While his wife had been out, raising the people at the doctor's house of call to go for him, Dirk laid the limp head back upon the pillow, and closed the dimming eyes, like fading violets; then he met the mother at the door as she entered, and taking her in his arms said, as he kissed her tenderly, 'My poor darling—my poor darling.'

'Oh, don't tell me she is dead,' shrieked the mother, struggling to get past him to the bed. 'Don't say that I have not seen my angel die.'

'You saw the last of her, dear; she was gone past all consciousness before you left her.'

'Oh! oh!! oh!!! accursed!!!! merciless God, to take my best.'

She sank in a heap on the floor, rubbing one hand over the other, and staring with mad eyes into vacancy as she repeated the words over and over in a low monotone. 'My best—my best—my best!'

Then Dirk lost his head with the horror of that fixed glare, and rushed to his next-door neighbour, knocking loudly and crying, 'Come, for God's sake, Mrs. Hawley, to my wife, for my child is dead, and I don't know what to do.'

After a time this neighbour opened the door with her dressing-gown on. She had been in bed, and followed him upstairs to where his wife and dead child were, but Mrs. Davelock never moved from her fixed position.

'I don't think I can do anything, Mr. Davelock, I am not used to death; you had better get Nurse Oggles. But how did it happen?'

Then Dirk told her hurriedly how unexpected the end had come.

'But did the child die *alone*?' she asked in a hard surprised tone.

'Certainly not, I was with her.'

'But you don't mean to say that the mother actually went away at such a time?'

There was cold unsympathetic reproach in her tone, for she was annoyed at being called at such an hour from her bed; and Dirk felt that she would not be of any use.

'Will you wait for a few moments, Mrs. Hawley, till I get Mrs. Oggles?'

'Yes, if you are not long.'

Then Dirk ran to rouse Nurse Oggles, but without getting any reply. He went then to another neighbour, one whom the respectable ones all despised as being disreputable. This woman was anything but respectable, certainly, but she rose promptly and accompanied him without a murmur. She had no dressing-gown on, and only took time to fling on an old shawl and petticoat, but she had one woman's instinct for another, which the highly respectable one had not, and took the dazed woman to her sin-stained bosom, weeping over her and stroking her hair tenderly.

Mrs. Hawley, who had been standing bolt upright looking at the dead maiden stolidly, no sooner beheld this pariah enter with Dirk than she drew her skirts disdainfully aside, saying loftily, 'I will go now, since you have found *your friend*.' She laid a scornful emphasis on the word friend, and Dirk let her go without protest, escorting her politely to her own door, then he rushed once more to Nurse Oggles.

This time he was more successful, and the old woman quickly followed him to the house.

'Has the doctor been sent for?' she asked as she took her place.

'Yes,' replied Dirk.

'Then take your missus into another room, while I wash and dress the little girl.'

Then they took his wife between them into the empty room where he used to work, where she sat upon a chair without seeming to see them, muttering, 'My best—my best—oh, cruel God!'

'If we could only get her to cry,' said the weeping pariah. But the mad mother had no tears to shed, only a blasted, burning, arid brain, and a seared contracted heart.

When Dr. Howler Addit came, he merely looked at the dead one, and turning to Dirk said—

'Surely you must have seen this coming on this time?'

'No,' replied the father; 'she was well yesterday.'

'Well, then, all I have to say is, that we must have an inquest on her.'

'Don't say that, doctor; I cannot have my child's body desecrated.'

'I can't help it; I ought to have been sent for before this.'

'But she was your patient and in your hands, and you ought to know what her trouble was.'

'Any fool could tell what her trouble was—*heart disease*.'

Consumption, worms, heart disease! O these wise doctors of this scientific age!

The doctor was speaking roughly and loudly. His hateful voice penetrated to the brain of the dazed mother, who sprang up wildly and rushed at him.

'What is this I hear,' she cried, fury darting from her eyes. 'An inquest on my Katie?'

The doctor merely nodded his head.

'Will you allow this, Dirk?'

'No,' said Dirk savagely; 'I'll go to jail first before any coroner enters this door.'

'And I will murder the man who dares to touch my darling.'

The mad mother's blazing eyes glared wildly round for a moment until they fell upon the white sculptured loveliness of that dead child, now dressed in her last earthly robe, and, flinging herself beside her, the tears came at last.

'Doctor,' said Dirk, seizing the medical ghoul by the arm, 'come with me downstairs, I will speak to you there.'

When they reached the parlour, he turned fiercely upon him.

'Now, Dr. Addit, I am due you some money; but don't be afraid, I'll pay it honourably enough. But understand this, my daughter was your patient to the last, and it was your blame if she has been neglected; dare to refuse to sign the certificate properly, and I'll expose you in every

court as her murderer, and afterwards—kill you like a vicious rat.'

'Dr. Addit was a bully, but he wasn't a brave man; he drew back a step and said: 'I'll do what I can to spare you this trouble.'

'Yes, doctor, do, or I'll keep my word.'

Dirk let him go after this; for the present he had no time to mourn as he had now to think how he could raise the funds to bury Katie. He sat down and wrote to one man who owed him money for work done, and who professed to be his friend and well-wisher; to his request this man replied that he could only spare a pound, as he had to send his own wife to the country. Then he wrote to another, who was a perfect stranger. He responded by sending the full amount which he owed, although on the eve of bankruptcy. He failed in business the week after, while the pretended well-wisher prospered.

Finding this sum insufficient, Dirk wrote and borrowed the sum wanted from his brother-in-law, who, to his honour, sent it promptly, so that the proud little Katie, who had been so independent in her life, had to be buried on borrowed money.

Yet not quite, for the one grudged pound from the pretended friend, and the other willingly sent prepaid account from the stranger bankrupt, covered the ground and coffin expenses, along with what he had remaining of that Christmas debt of honour, which had been such a cause of rejoicing, when it came so unexpectedly.

Next day Dr. Addit brought the certificate signed 'sudden death,' along with the date of his former visit two months before. Dirk took it and read it with an ominous gleam in his eyes.

'I dare say you will get past all right,' observed the doctor.

'I hope so—for your sake, Dr. Addit.'

He got it past without the necessity of an inquest. The registration officer did so when he saw the unpopular name of Dr. Howler Addit on the certificate, otherwise he admitted that he would not have done it if any respectable doctor had filled it in.

'We know him here,' he observed; 'and I can see he wants to get you into trouble, if he can.'

Then they put all that was left of Katie into a little white

coffin, and Dirk had it covered with flowers, also getting immortelles to lay upon the grave.

But he was not allowed to bury her as he desired, for the ground was a new cemetery, and under the directions of Mr. Percy Baldhead, who had made rules and regulations of his own. No immortelles nor artificial flowers were to be allowed here, as he had said in his manifesto. 'They wished to keep out all the vulgar abominations with which the poorer class sometimes decorate their graves.'

Dirk discovered that everything was charged a fee for in this model cemetery; besides there were so many prohibitions that it was not possible for mourning friends to display any token of devotion or grief over the graves, without first consulting the capricious and tyrannical will of this arrogant land proprietor. He had to bury his immortelles and wreath of forget-me-nots, Katie's favourite flower, with the coffin, and leave her grave as the others were left, bare and uncovered earth mounds.

'Oh, Land of the Free,' he thought bitterly, as he looked round this God's Acre of noteless mounds. Not one tombstone stood there. It was graceless like the empty souls of the Cemetery Board.

They laid her in the unconsecrated portion of the ground, for Dirk felt that such consecration as the Board permitted would be sacrilege to the martyr who had given herself to God. Her grave was the first which marked this portion of God's Acre; in front of the walk she lay, with a wide expanse of snow-covered soil to be yet occupied. 'And my Katie has to rest in such a place,' he murmured as he turned desolately away. Even for death, in this village of Pearstone they had no respect.

Mrs. Hawley said the next day that she had received a great shock to her system by coming to that death-bed, yet she washed and hung out her washing as usual, and kept her blinds up on the day of the funeral. The undertaker was the only stranger present to honour that sad funeral. However, he had lost some of his own children, and looked pitiful as he helped Dirk to carry her away.

Then they saw after she was gone how she had occupied that last day of earth, and felt from this evidence that she had made her everlasting contract. They found all her

treasures carefully sorted up and packed away as one does when they are going upon a long journey; her paint-box washed and laid neatly in her own drawer. She had come over the bed in the short time she had asked to be alone, packed up her earthly treasures, to save her mother the trouble, with the angels looking on at her preparations. What did she think upon then, this great and holy soul, who had lived with them for ten years?

Her father and mother felt desolate and accursed in their misery, and yet they had both cause to be very proud even in their loss. Had not the Great King taken their two fairest girls to grace His court? Was it not a priceless honour that these should have been chosen out of the many left? Ah, we are so short-sighted in our lack of faith. Katie and Baby Bell they could not see; but where they were in those halls of glory they could come when they liked to the desolate hearth. Proud Katie, proud Bell, but far more honoured father and mother, if they had not been so blind in their misery at the parting.

The day before the funeral, while Dirk sat watching the lovely lineaments of his lost darling, Bertha came to him and whispered that Mrs. Wilkings was downstairs waiting to see him.

He went down, a wrathful feeling at his heart, that this woman should dare to come at such a moment, with what he expected to be her false sympathy. However, when he reached the parlour and saw her standing with a triumphant look of gratified malice upon her wizzened features, he felt that he had given her even in that first harsh thought too much credit.

'What do you want?' he asked harshly.

'I have come for the ground rent for the next half year.'

'But I paid all your husband's claims.'

'Oh no, you didn't pay one. You forgot as it was not then due. Still my husband is willing to forgive your insolence, and as you are so hard up, he says he would rather pay it himself if you will apologise for your bad conduct, and settle with him when you are able.'

Dirk did not think whether this claim was legal or not, he only felt the malice which had suggested the visit—they could not resist throwing a stone at the fallen.

'Mrs. Wilkings, tell your husband that I cannot attend to

this at present, but will see him another time.' He showed her out as he spoke, and returned to his dead darling.

What the little liar told her husband Dirk could not know, but on the day of the funeral, and just as he was taking his place in the cab, a seedy looking man leaned forward from the crowd, and patting him lightly on the shoulder, shoved a crumpled piece of paper into his hand. He did not look at it then, but absently pushed it into his pocket. After the burial was all over he discovered that it was a summons which Mr. Wilkings had taken out for the instant recovery of his ground rent.

It was New Year's Day, and the summons was fixed for the 4th of January, as he sat in the parlour with that tobaccoless pipe in his mouth in front of that fireless and rusty grate. He was past caring for the summons or the disgrace which would follow afterwards, when the bailiffs came to take possession. What is the world's contumely or mocking scorn to a man who is done with it?

A few more days for him and his wife; a little longer, perhaps, for the children to suffer, who had just fed themselves; then the brokers and bailiffs could come to reveal to the world the dead bodies of a starved-out family. A newspaper had come that morning with a long elegy on his darling Katie, whom they had known to be so clever in the 'children's corner,' also a fine panegyric on a picture of his which was then being exhibited. In one column the death of his child, in another the records of his own empty glory.

He had not opened the paper. What was the use of doing so? or of doing anything more now? He knew what it would be—he had notices so often of late.

Alone, alone! with the ashes in the grate, and the ashes of the past in his dull and ice-cold heart.

He was sitting with vacant mind, when he heard the postman's knock—a double knock. 'Doubtless some present of a new book,' he muttered, as he got up to answer the door.

No! There were letters—one a registered letter, which he had to sign for; and then he went back to his seat to examine them listlessly. He had so little interest in the world, so little curiosity remaining, that he left the registered letter to the last, opening the first which came to hand.

He found in the first an order for him to write an article for a magazine which had never yet employed him, but which he used to be desirous to get into. They wanted it in a great hurry. He laid it on one side wearily.

The second was from a publisher asking him if he could write a book and illustrate it, offering him liberal terms if he would consent to do so. Too late! too late! He would be dead before the first chapter was half done.

The third was from the secretary of the Exhibition, telling him that his picture was sold, but that it would not be paid for before the close of the Exhibition, yet two months. Oh! sublime mockery of success!

He opened the registered one, and saw it was from a lawyer. It began:—

'Sir,—This is to intimate that your uncle, the wealthy Australian squatter, John Davelock, died last week in a hotel in Metaltown' (Dirk didn't know he had any rich uncle, and his miser cousin did not count), 'and has left you his heir to all that he possessed. At a rough calculation it cannot be under two hundred thousand pounds. We should have let you know sooner, only that we had great difficulty in discovering your address. Therefore, in order to insure us of the safe delivery of this letter, and also in case that you might require some ready cash, we beg to enclose you a cheque for one hundred and fifty pounds for your present use. Waiting for your further instructions, we are your very obedient servants, Bimwell and Bitit.'

Dirk read the words listlessly, and only half grasping their meaning at first. Then, seeing the pale green edge of a paper protruding from between the sheets, he pulled it out, and saw an open cheque for one hundred and fifty pounds, made payable to Dirk Davelock, Esq.

Then he comprehended the meaning of the letter, and with a bitter curse of abhorrence he dashed letter and cheque upon the dusty floor, and stamped upon them in his savage fury.

'So this is what our angel died for, is it? Oh, my God! oh, my God! what a horrible world it is!'

CHAPTER II

GOOD-BYE TO PEARSTONE

SIX months have rolled along smoothly, like the softly furnished car of a Sybarite upon its carefully oiled golden wheels, while the Davelock family have had time to get somewhat used to the unaccustomed luxury of having money to command *ad libitum*.

At the first it was terrifying to have this colossal fortune thrust upon them whether they would or not; to be lifted all of a sudden from the very deepest tier of the pit Despair right up, without having breathing time, to the pinnacle of the mountain of Success. For a while they shivered and felt uncomfortable with the abrupt change from lofty contempt upon every face which passed them to the prospective view which they got of bended backs. Pearstone alone, with incredulous scepticism, scowled upon them rudely to the last. 'Show off,' these sullen and graceless sons and daughters of the clay-mud said scoffingly to rumour. So Dirk, his wife, and children had left the 'village vermin' to thrive and increase and suck the blood of other strangers, as vermin always do, while they went upon their travels.

Before Dirk left, however, he called upon Mr. Wilkings and squared up with him for the summons. He might have deputed his lawyer to have done this dirty job, but he preferred doing so himself as he wished to see the pictures his wife had given them, and, if possible, purchase them again, so as to leave no single token behind him.

Mr. Wilkings took the money for the ground rent, with the added legal expenses, which he, however, wished to throw in.

'No, don't!' observed Dirk. 'I could not bear the thought of being indebted to you for a single concession

now, or for anything which might lessen my contempt for you.'

'As you like,' answered Mr. Wilkings meekly, as he signed the receipt and handed it back.

'This finishes up all claims you have against me, does it not?' asked Dirk.

'Yes, you are quite free from the cottage now.'

'Thank God for that, at any rate. Now, I should like to make you an offer for those pictures of mine, as I'd like them back.'

Mr. Wilkings whispered a moment to his evil-minded prompter, who replied tartly—

'Certainly not; what we gets we keeps.'

'I dare say you do; it is a characteristic which I have noticed before amongst your kind. But I will give you a better price for them than you are ever likely to get anywhere else.'

She was a greedy woman, and paused to think it over, while her addle-headed lord whispered again in her ears, 'It's no use being too hard, Bessy, best let him have them.'

Dirk heard the words, and looked eagerly towards her, seeing which look, the woman's snaky venom rose superior to her love of gain, and setting her teeth hard together, she said, 'No! what I gets I keeps; he shan't have one o' them.'

'Well, will you allow me to see them for a moment?' A thought had occurred to Dirk that perhaps his name was not upon them, in which case it would not matter.

'No, you shan't see them either,' retorted she tartly.

Dirk looked at her quietly as she spoke, and then after a pause he observed—

'All right, Mrs. Wilkings, I must say that you are, without exception, the most ungrateful and poisonous little asp, as well as the meanest woman, that ever I met in my whole life, and I have seen a good number of reptiles, both abroad and in this country.'

Dirk paused, expecting her husband to rouse up and spring upon him for the insult. He was longing for a chance to relieve his pent-up feelings, but none came. The young man looked at the ground sedately, but made no remark.

'And as for you, Mr. Wilkings—well, then, I bear you no

great animosity, as you would have been a very decent fellow if left to yourself, so I wish you no worse luck than the wife you have got. Good-night.'

And Dirk stuck his hat upon his head and stalked out into the darkness, Mr. Wilkings meekly holding the light to show him his way past the steps.

He did not himself settle with Dr. Howler Addit, but left that matter to his lawyer with injunctions for him to look strictly into the charges and pay only what he was legally entitled to pay. This the lawyer did with such an energy and amount of brow-beating at the impostor that his bill was cut down to about one-fourth of its original size, the only punishment which could possibly have hurt Dr. Howler Addit. Three weeks after the lawyer had finished him, a cry of rejoicing went up from the legitimate practitioners of the place when they discovered that this locust had taken his departure during the night, leaving his hired furniture and horses behind him, with the rent unpaid for three-quarters. He had demolished the land as far as possible and gone to pastures new. His creditors hope to be able to lay hands on him before long, and are looking out for his next appearance amongst the swampy fen-countries, where they are positive he will, with the natural instinct of his species, betake himself to.

Mrs. Rosebud was not liberated when they left, but her husband was going to meet her the next week, and borrowed five shillings from Dirk for the purpose of paying her train back. Some of the neighbours who had given their evidence against her were now busy removing their furniture to other streets out of her way. They all thought it wisdom to lose themselves, rather than wait for the prodigal's return.

Dirk also got one parting glimpse of Mrs. Pigott the day before he left. She was running along the bank opposite her house with arms above her head and scanty tresses flying in the wind, her plank-like figure in striking *déshabille*, and one or two of the neighbours after her. She was seeking the pond to commit suicide, while her bosom friend, Mrs. Wilkings, stood clutching to her own gate-post to keep herself steady, a dull film over her squinting eyes. They had been talking scandal together, and washing it down with their favourite 'unsweetened.'

The impish one did not succeed in drowning her blue devils, for the neighbours caught her up before she reached the clay-pits, and bore her struggling, foaming, and cursing, back into her own house. When shortly afterwards the two husbands returned, they could no longer shut their eyes to the state of things which had been so long going on during their absence.

Poor Mr. Wilkings was the most astonished as well as the most morally crushed with the debasing spectacle, for he was a strict teetotaller himself and hitherto thought his wife to be the same. He listened horrified to her incoherent gabble, as she swayed to and fro in front of him at the gate, thinking for a moment that she must have had a mental shock and was deranged, until a heavy sigh wafted the tell-tale aroma over him and put his perplexity at rest for ever. She had been in the habit of accusing Johnny, her son, of taking out the money left for household expenses and losing it. He saw now with a melancholy sadness how it had been lost, also why the chimneys so often needed sweeping; so taking her by the arm he led her indoors and laid her upon the bed to sleep it off.

'Don'tsh mindsh — my — tempcher — Mr. Davelock; I don'tsh hatsh *you*,' she muttered, as she leered at her husband. 'It'sh your nashy wife—I hatsh—knows too mush.'

She fell asleep with gurgling gasps, while the rudely awakened house-agent took up his dirty-faced boy upon his knock-knees and looked into the dead and neglected fireplace.

With the little, fat, and red-faced cupid from the timber-yard it was, however, no new sight to see 'Halice' excited. Indeed, it had been his ordinary habit to open the front door gently with his latch-key and pitch his hat in first, to find out how the wind lay before he entered himself; if it was left unmolested, then he entered himself, sure of a quiet reception from his baby-faced wife. If, however, he heard the hat danced upon, then he knew that there would be squalls, and discreetly sought the public-house, contenting himself with that military supper, a smoke, washed down by a glass of 'Mild and Burton.' That day he was only too happy to find the storm blown over, and the plank-like form and faded

face with its infantile smile lying on the sofa, sleeping the dreamless sleep of babyhood. For the present he was perfectly safe; it was only when she woke up that his fat head and thick skull must look out for flying plates and boots.

It was a bigger fortune than Messrs. Bimwell and Bitit wrote it down in that first letter. When all came to be squared up, in cash which could be called in at a week's notice, there was over two hundred and fifty thousand pounds; while, what with mining speculations, wool trade, and land property, both in England, Australia, and other parts of the globe, Dirk Davelock found himself the owner of a very large fortune indeed. He had a hotel in one of the fashionable parts of Paris, and a neat estate in the South of France; a place amongst the wilds of Cumberland, and another on the shores of the Mediterranean, all late purchases of this rich old uncle whom Dirk had never heard about, although he knew that he must have relations somewhere knocking about.

He had, of course, seen the name of John Davelock, the Australian squatter-prince, but he never for a moment connected him in any way with his own family, nor sought to find out whether he belonged to his people or not, in his rapid journey through that vast continent. But the wifeless and childless old man had not lost sight of him or his doings. Possibly enough, if Dirk had exhibited any curiosity, he might have fallen in the estimation of the keen-eyed but jealous-minded squatter, and been regarded as a money-hunter. Through ignorance Dirk had saved himself from this imputation, and tickled the old man's fancy by what he took to be cool indifference and independence on the part of his nephew.

His will was characteristic of the man, terse and to the point. 'I leave all that I possess, without reservation, to Dirk Davelock, my nephew, who went through Australia without stopping to pass the time of day with his uncle, John Davelock.'

Dirk and his wife went into town, saw the lawyer, and drew some more money. After which they called at the fashionable dressmakers and tailors, and ordered what they required to make a proper appearance in the world, directing

the articles to be sent to the place where his uncle had died, the Hotel Monopole. Here they had taken apartments through Messrs. Bimwell and Bitit, who told them that they must put up here until they could decide upon a house, as it was the correct thing with rich colonials or their heirs to do.

After this duty was safely got over, they went to enjoy themselves, that is, they went and had a plain dinner and a good glass of lager beer, and returned once more to Pearstone, as they were in the habit of doing, second class. Dirk always went third when alone, so that the natives, when they saw them return in this unostentatious fashion, straightway began to mock at the rumour of this wealth as a fiction. They were all such wanton liars themselves that they could not credit a simple statement; and as Dirk and his wife had no desire to be considered in any other light than they had been regarded in this village, they did not seek to enlighten these savages as to their altered circumstances.

Their immediate neighbours followed the crowd, and paid them increased scorn, over which they laughed. Mrs. Hawley, who was the grass-widow of a commercial traveller, whose particular line of business she was very reserved about, when she heard that the tradesmen had been all paid and the rent and taxes settled, had shown some symptoms of taking up with them. She had a face like a bull-dog, with two daughters strongly resembling nice little bull-pups. She began the conciliation in the usual method, by weeping over imaginary wrongs, and accusing Mrs. Davelock of neglect and unkindness.

'Wait until you have a 'usband as far away, and who puts you in an equivocal position as mine do, and then you won't like it.'

Mrs. Davelock felt as if she must, in her abstraction of grief and misery, have, perhaps, done something to wound the fine feelings of this feminine bull-dog, until she remembered her behaviour, which hardened her melting heart.

'I am sure I was ill for a week after Katie's death, and I hurt my leg dreadfully that night coming in.'

Mrs. Davelock remembered that she had not been too ill to wash her clothes, or gossip with the other neighbours most of the next day, but only replied softly—

'I also was very ill.'

This neighbour, seeing that they made no display about the place after paying all their debts, once more drew in, and replied with icy coldness when they chanced to meet. While, as for the other neighbour who had been at the first so effusive, she cut them direct as impostors, while her boys jeered from the outside; and her husband, who was something in town, and as haughty in his demeanour as a grocer out for a holiday, gazed fixedly at Dirk whenever he met him at the station, as if he asked him how he dared be there at all. It was all very comical, now that they had nothing to do except write out cheques, to see these rapid changes with this poor devil, who brushed his clothes each morning until they were almost threadbare; who was afraid to sit down lest he should wear out his trousers, and who managed with frantic efforts on his own part, and a lodger on the part of his wife's, to make a display of this shoddy villa on eighty pounds a year. Intensely amusing to see the airs they gave themselves when out together, or the impudence with which he strutted up before Dirk in the waiting-room, showing him his hinder regions, while he took up the rest of the fire warming his morning paper. He thought it aristocratic to buy a morning paper and hold it spread over the fire to the discomfort of the others waiting on the train, even although, to get that paper, he had to take dripping instead of butter upon his bread. 'Arry in a villa is such a devil of a fellow.

Dirk felt a grim pleasure in watching all these antics. He no longer saw a comic side to anything, he had suffered too utterly for that, it was only the drivelling vanity and unkindly insignificance which made him chuckle as he looked at them playing their vicious tricks, like goat-feeted satyrs. Had he seen a trace of soul or kindness about the vile crowd, he would have honoured it, and read them after the genial humour of a Dickens, but he could see nothing of it. He hadn't travelled far enough east for that as yet.

He was also glad to see Mr. Percy Baldhead come to his door one morning and ask for him. It did him good to turn this mighty pillar away and watch the back of him as he tramped out of the gate with his long bare neck and coarse ears scarlet with rage at the rebuff. This fine country

gentleman had heard of his fortune, and had come to honour him after these two years of disdain.

Dirk looked about him after this, and thought carefully over his judgment of this village-mud produce. Was there not one soul who had said or shown him a single kindness since he had been amongst them, and to whom he could now show a return and benefit? One only he wanted, as Esop wanted his honest man to redeem the others, man, woman, or child, and like Esop he went hunting about with the lantern of his memory over the two past years.

No, not one who deserved a single benefit; for the village pariah, who had been kind to the mother of Katie on that fell night, had departed to scenes more congenial to her gay disposition. Yet Dirk hoped to find her some day and reward her. All the others were alike—greedy, treacherous, mean, and cowardly; aboriginals of utter depravity. Only one thing could benefit them—a general flood. Had it been possible, he might have suggested a choice of two fates, fire or water, but the fire was out of the question, for nothing could burn in Pearstone, so that the vermin could only be drowned.

It was no use staying any longer here, since he could not command a general and effective flood. One morning they all walked out of the village, as if going for a day's shopping, and getting its mud carefully scraped and brushed off their feet at the city station, bade it good-bye for ever.

Yet not quite for ever, so long as the body of their angel daughter lay in the begrudged and accursed swamp.

CHAPTER III

A PLEASANT WORLD

THEY did not stay long at the Hotel Monopole on that first visit, just long enough to sign the legal documents necessary to prove his rights and identity, and be nearly inundated with letters and circulars from all parts. Invitations to fashionable houses, cards of introduction, plans of companies and airy speculations, over which he was invited to be chairman. Public dinners, box seats for new pieces, impostors' appeals; in fact, all that goes to torture a wealthy man and make up that smoking haggis which is termed society.

He now perceived that the man who has plenty of money does not require to put his hand in his pocket half or quarter as frequently as the man who has hardly any, but that he gets pitched at him gratis all that the other has to pay dearly for. A millionaire, if mean enough, can easily go through life, piling up his dollars and interest, without spending a farthing, as all the lesser fish are delighted to have the honour of throwing their mites into his replete coffers. It is the way of this pleasant world all the world over.

Dirk had read about men waking up in the morning famous. He could not believe it in his famishing days, but he had ample proof that all creation knew about himself, his wonderful genius and mighty money-bags, the first morning on which he opened his eyes in that gorgeous bower of comfort at the Monopole, and strolled into the anteroom, which was like a post-office at sorting hour. He looked about him with dismay. 'However am I going to find out my own letters from this lot?' he muttered disconsolately, as he dug his hands into the pockets of his dressing-gown. 'I must have a secretary.'

He had no sooner breathed the wish than a couple of hundred applicants for the post were ushered in. Dirk looked them over, discarding the smart, dapper, self-satisfied office-hunters, to fix upon the most seedy and dilapidated one amongst them.

'Hard up?' asked Dirk laconically.

'Yes,' replied the applicant, looking at his worn boots and speaking with a strong Victorian accent which went straight to Dirk's heart.

'What are you?'

'Well, I've been many things in my life,' said the other in a tone of defiance: 'clerk, tramp, bushman, man before the mast—but mostly tramp.'

'That'll do,' said Dirk, 'help me to look over these letters.'

Dirk didn't ask him for a reference, or to prove his honesty. He intended to find that out for himself, and this was the only one out of the two hundred who had not 'sir'd' him at every second word.

'You had a job to get in here, I suppose?' observed Dirk, as he leaned back and lit his pipe after an hour's hard work.

'Yes,' replied the other, 'rather; but I pushed my way in through the crowd when I heard what you wanted.'

He was a weather-tanned man of about Dirk's own age, who had seen rough service, and had not learned the art of hiding it, which was exactly what Dirk wanted to counterbalance the awe he felt in the presence of the well-trained, superior waiters who were all about him. After a little conversation they concluded their bargain.

'You will stay here, of course?' said Dirk as he concluded.

'Well, I'd rather not, if you don't mind.'

'Why?—married?'

'No, but I have a little dog which has gone all over the world, whom I cannot part with; and as he is not much of a breed, he may be an objection to a place like this.'

Dirk felt his eye moisten as he heard this. The man who loves his dog enough to risk a good place for him may not be the most honest man in the world, but he cannot be the worst.

'Where is this dog?'

'At my lodgings.'

'Then go and fetch him along here, with your other belongings.'

A grateful ray for the first time beamed from the eye of the man, by name—Jack Ridgeway.

'Thank you, *sir*.'

It was the first time he had called his employer 'sir,' and Dirk felt satisfied.

The moment Dirk got his release from the offices of Messrs. Bimwell and Bitit they all left Metaltown, on the grand tour through France, staying a couple of weeks at Paris, and then on to their possessions in Spain—a lovely little place on the seashore, where, at this time of the year, it was a pleasure to stay and bask in the sunshine.

'Ah me! if we could only have brought our noble Katie to this place,' moaned his wife as she sat beside him while he sketched and watched the blue waters of the Mediterranean sparkling before them, and thought upon that ice-bound country.

'She is here and wherever we go, playing with the children on the seashore over there, and coming every now and again to see how her papa, of whom she is so proud, is getting on.' Dirk spoke with strong conviction, and as if he felt the little hand amongst his hair. They were all growing strong, the other children.

After a time, as the weather became hotter, they moved towards France, and so on back once more to Metaltown, in good time for the opening of the Exhibition. Dirk was working hard, for what before he had done for necessity of bread had now become a necessity to make time pass. His secretary and dog went with him everywhere. A gaunt, ungainly mongrel this dog was, dirty-white, like the hound which had belonged to Billy, the aboriginal. It soon became a prime favourite with them, and an animal of great importance in the household, as his master was with all who wished to gain the ear of Dirk. Yet neither of them abused their position—the man, always ready with his blunt advice, and keen to find out worthy cases for the bestowal of charity.

One day, in Paris, Dirk, while sitting in a shady part of the Champs Élysées, saw his secretary pass along absent-

mindedly, with his dog at his heels. As Dirk sat watching the pair he saw Ridgeway accost a very shabbily dressed outcast; and after speaking a few moments, take out of his pocket a handful of money and shove it into her hand, after which he walked on his way without observing his master. That afternoon, when they were together, he tackled him about this weakness.

'I say, Ridgeway, what were you up to with that woman in the Champs Élysées this morning?'

Ridgeway took a very red face for a moment, and then clearing his throat, said—

'Well, you see, Mr. Davelock, I never can pass a girl of that kind if she is hard up and has a hole in her right boot; that's a weakness of mine.'

'Why the right boot more than the left?'

'I'll tell you: once I was hard up in Sydney, so hard up that I was very glad to hang about theatre-doors and pick up the stumps of cigars which the frequenters had flung away, and chew them to keep the hunger back. One night—I hadn't tasted a bite for four days'—(how well Dirk could understand that state of affairs, and how vividly came up Christmas week at Pearstone)—'it was a miserable wet night, and I lay shivering on a seat in the Park, trying to keep my rags together, without boots, for a number of the Sydney "forties"[1] had stolen them while I slept the night before from my feet—hungry and wretched, with my starving dog beside me, and both of us drenched through from that solid downpour. As we lay together trying to warm each other a young girl came up, likewise drenched to the skin, and sat down beside me.

'"You seem miserable enough, mate," she said.

'"Yes," I replied, "I am both cold and hungry."

'"Poor devil! Well, I'm not much better myself, but I've got a tanner that you are welcome to if you like."

'I would have refused her if I had not been so desperate, for I knew how that sixpence had been earned, but it was not in me. A man becomes a cur when he is starving; so in another five minutes we were sitting with a steaming basin of Irish stew between us, and "Jumpo" there as eager almost

[1] 'The Forty Thieves' was the title of a gang of Sydney thieves some years ago.

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as I was over it. She wasn't very pretty, that girl, and she had spent a hard youth on the streets, so that she was undersized and skinny, with only a tattered cotton skirt and an old black jacket to cover her misery. Nothing else, except a pair of paramatta boots, the right one of which had a hole over the little toe, through which her bare foot could be seen.

'We finished that Irish stew between us, that is, my dog and I, for she only took one small bit of potato, and then we slunk out into the rain.

'"See here, mate, you are no good at making money to-night. I may have a chance. Go back to the seat and wait for me. If I am in luck, I'll come to you before morning." I waited all night, and the sky was clear next morning, but she didn't come; so after shaking myself together, I made through the Park towards George Street. As I got near the end of the domain I saw a couple of policemen bending over something on the ground, which I went up out of curiosity to look at also. It was my little friend of the night before lying bare-breasted, with only her cotton skirt on, and the marks of smashes all over her wasted body. Blue ugly bruises on an unwashed skin—the "forties" must have killed her for the sake of that old jacket as she was making her way back to me, and also taken one of her boots —the left—but had most likely been disturbed by some one before they got the other off, for it was there still with the hole over the little toe, and the little toe sticking out. That is why I can never pass a woman with a hole in her right boot, for that morning's picture never leaves me, and never will——'

Dirk grasped his friend's hand with a close grasp. He was secretary no longer, but partner in the distributing of that unexpected fortune.

'Jumpo' became the rage both in Paris and London. Dirk got a massive golden collar for him, partly out of a spirit of mockery at the fashionable pets and partly out of affection for the mongrel himself. An uncomfortable ornament it was for 'Jumpo,' but he had to endure it, as Dirk had to endure his responsibilities, through being the companion of a man of fortune. In a short time dirty-white, gaunt, and ugly mongrels became the fashion, and no one

was considered 'correct form' without one, which was a great source of anxiety to the dog-fanciers. It is much easier to raise a pure breed to a pattern than it is when they get mixed up. 'One can never tell what the next throw-off will be like,' these dealers would say. 'They may be the right colour or they may not.'

Dirk laughed like a 'Mephistopheles' when he saw the result of his fancy, and the fabulous price distant replicas of 'Jumpo' fetched in the dog-market. It was as good as a farce to them both, Ridgeway and Davelock.

One day they got the offer of two thousand pounds for 'Jumpo' from an American millionaire. 'Not for a hundred thousand pounds,' answered Dirk, and after this the sporting columns quoted 'Jumpo' as 'the hundred thousand pound mongrel'—for no man with any pretension to 'good form' in the upper world would read or speak about anything else than a mongrel after 'Jumpo's' pattern. Pure blood was all at a discount in the fashionable world now, as the blue blood of the Norman is coming to be—not to be tolerated upon any consideration.

CHAPTER IV

FASHIONABLE FADS

DIRK DAVELOCK had become an art authority. He did not seek the position, but it was forced upon him by that generous world which would not be gainsaid now, although it had left him to starve six months before.

He did not send any of his pictures to the Exhibitions now, for he knew that, no matter what they were like, they would be sure to be well hung. The gambling excitement of uncertainty had passed away; but he went to the opening crushes and the private views. Here some of the members crowded about him, eager for commissions, and wondered how it was that he had not exhibited nor ever tried to gain Academic honours. 'Will you not join our ranks?' they asked him affectionately, the genial fellows that they all were, and he only smiled and replied, 'No, thank you, I have prostituted my abilities enough already in the past.'

He, however, bought a picture or two. He got an opera-glass, and looked up high for his purchases. Knowing, as he did, what was good naturally, without being stamped with the hackneyed Academical brand of sameness, he found out some struggling men and women of ability, and saved them from the flames. But he did not go to look for much ability on these walls, for originality could never possibly have been allowed to pass the keen eyes of the committee. When he wanted to find that sort of thing he prowled through pawn-shops and little broker's shops. There he found canvases which told him tragedies, and which he was sometimes in time to turn into a comedy before the curtain fell upon the last act. If, however, he saw a very tiny picture well painted and high hung in the Exhibitions, he knew that the painter

hadn't too much influence, but had tried to sneak in unobserved; and, sometimes, when he sought him out, he discovered a worthy man, but not often, for the very fact of his being there at all was against all theories of manliness.

During the private-view day he was a little astonished to run against Mr. Melgarf, who was along with a little knot of well-dressed men of his own age. Dirk did not think the aged one had been so far in with art or art-mongering, since he had so persistently kept from doing Dirk any service in the past.

'Find out all about the man you see me talk to presently,' he whispered to his faithful companion, Ridgeway, and then he went forward and shook hands with the old gentleman, who was almost bent double with delight at seeing Davelock again. There was no mistaking Dirk's position now in the world. By wriggling enough he could show his respect for this prodigious success, therefore he wriggled like an Italian poodle.

'By the way,' observed Dirk, as he watched the ovations of the smiling old man over him, 'has your brother still got those pictures that he ordered through you from me?'

'I—I am afraid not,' replied the old gentleman with some confusion. 'But I know that he would count it an honour if you would paint him another at your own price.'

'No, thank you, Mr. Melgarf. I have given up selling my pictures now; in fact, I wanted to re-purchase. Have you got the half-dozen which I made you a present of, if so, I will take them from you at your own price?'

'I—think so. Yes, I am sure I have them, and will bring them to you in a week's time from now.'

'Yes, do!' answered Dirk languidly. He knew that the old man had sold them, but also that he would try to recover them, if possible.

'Well, who is he?' Dirk asked Ridgeway, who at that moment appeared, as with a nod at Mr. Melgarf the two strolled into a corner of the room.

'A pettifogging picture-dealer. They are all in the same line, that group beside him, men who hunt down unfortunates until they are driven to suicide, after which they buy up all their pictures for an old song, and then work the markets, so that the unknown name goes up.'

Ridgeway made a first-rate detective, and as Dirk looked over at the group of old, black-coated gentlemen while they hovered and stooped over a canvas near the ground, he could not help comparing them to carrion-crows clustering above a corpse. He remembered, with a shudder, how very near these hunters had been to succeeding in their designs with him.

'But how do they manage to build up a name after the owner has starved? Wouldn't it be better to keep the goose alive?'

'Sometimes they do, as in the case of Scratcher, the posturing "Fashion Fad," who, knowing the showman business thoroughly, and how much the public can stand in the way of nonsense and rubbish, they permitted to live at the first because they could not help it. He had found a wealthy patron who could afford to spend a fortune upon his *protégé*, therefore the vultures made a virtue of necessity and obeyed the man whom in the first place they couldn't crush.'

'Ah, Scratcher, I think, is the most perfect humbug of the nineteenth century. But you are well posted up in the tricks of the trade, Ridgeway,' remarked Dirk, astonished that his secretary should know so much.

'I was for about six months in the service of a picture-dealer, and during that time learned some of their primary secrets. But not all, for, like masonry, this business has circle within circle of secrets and ramifications which it would take years to discover or to be initiated into. Still, I was kept on long enough to find out the open secret of how a painter's name is first made and afterwards bounced up.'

The two friends had now left the halls of modern art, and were sitting smoking their pipes in a little café near at hand. When Dirk wanted comfort he went to where he could smoke his pipe.

'Tell me how they manage it?' asked Dirk, interested in hearing about this infamous traffic of flesh and fame.

'Well, one old hand will get acquainted with a man whom the tribe have selected as their next victim. He will follow him week by week, discouraging him in every way he can think of, yet perhaps, occasionally, as if out of charity, buying a picture for about the price of the canvas and paint that is upon it, which they hide away. If, however, the victim gets

out of their meshes, or shows up rebellious, they generally manage to quash him by sending what pictures they have of his into a cheap auction-room and selling them without reserve. That effectually does for his chance of rising, and they lose nothing by the affair. If, however, the poor victim is of fine fibre, he will not rebel, but strain every effort like a blood-horse at a race to please the man he fancies to be his friend and patron. In his garret he will go on painting, hoping, each picture he turns off, to win a smile of approbation from his constant visitor, thinking for a long time with each rebuff that the blame lies with him, not in the lack of appreciation with his patron. He will have his fits of dejection and his fits of feverish inspiration, both of which are watched by that coldly calculating eye which never for a day loses sight of him.

'At last, worn out with despair, the unfortunate painter caves in; for his feigned patron, thinking he has done enough work, and who has other victims waiting upon his manipulations, tells him bluntly that he has mistaken his vocation, that he will never be a painter. He takes the moment of deepest depression for this bit of plain talking —result, a flying leap from a bridge, or a revolver-shot through the heart for the poor painter, and a garret of woe and want for his widow and children.'

'A nice game,' remarked Dirk bitterly.

'Very. After this comes along this picture-dealing friend and pretends to sympathise with the poor, broken-hearted widow. He tells her that the pictures of the suicide are not worth buying, still, as he liked him personally, he will give her enough to bury her husband and take herself and little ones out of the vile city in exchange for the piles of unsold pictures and sketches, an offer which the simple widow accepts with extravagant gratitude. She can never forget this good old man, nor cease to pray for his happiness.

'Act first is over safely, act second begins. The widow and children are safely got out of the way, for now that her artist-husband has been killed by art, she no longer has any interest in art or art news. Probably she will marry a workman or labourer for the sake of her little ones, and soon forget all about what her former husband did in his lifetime.

'Then the tribe begin to work. They fish out one or

two of the worst of the dead victim's labour, frame them elaborately, and put them in a fashionable saleroom with a heavy reserve. The room is half packed with their hired bidders—that's the employment I had to do mostly. And while the outsiders wonder at this unknown and unfinished daub starting at such a price, they get more astonished as they hear the bids rising by rapid degrees on all sides, until at last they begin to doubt their own judgment, and look on the canvas with respect. It is, of course, a speculation all throughout. If one of these fashionable loungers enter the list they will run him up to the figure they have fixed upon, and then let him have it. The price he pays for the one specimen will sufficiently remunerate them for the time they spend and the commission of the auctioneer. If, on the other hand, no outsider bites at the first sale, they do not lose much, only the commission and their men's wages. They do this for several times, introducing, perhaps, a couple, at every sale of consequence, during the season. Selling perhaps one and getting back the other, while the old touters knock about the art and literary clubs, of which they are members, dropping adroit hints about this wonderful new genius whom no one knows. By and by the world begins to talk and show an inclination to possess these rare treasures; writers of art biographies are employed to compose pretty sentimental romances about this neglected great man who died before he was recognised; and then the dealers begin to reap the golden reward of their ingenuity and patience. A few pictures shown at a time, for they are supposed to be scarce, over which the critics rave like newly raised prophets, and which they fondle as if they were priceless jewels. The murdered painter is a made name, and his assassins have added another wing to the immense building of their fortunes.'

'What a vile business; it gives me a nasty taste in my mouth,' ejaculated Dirk, as he called for another tankard of beer.

'It would have been your destiny had you not broken loose in time,' remarked Ridgeway solemnly.

'Tell me, Ridgeway, is it possible for me to get back my pictures, which I am positive he has sold, before this human ghoul can secure them?' cried Dirk excitedly.

'I'll try if I can do it.'

For the next four days it was a close hunt between Ridgeway and Mr. Melgarf as to who should secure Dirk's pictures first; at the end of which time Ridgeway drove back with all the pictures. He had just managed to get always before Mr. Melgarf, and left that kindly old gentleman foaming at the mouth with rage and disappointment.

On the fifth day Mr. Melgarf appeared before Dirk with subdued ferocity, and explained that it was out of his power to restore the pictures; some unknown dealer had got before him.

'Then you *had* sold my presents, Mr. Melgarf?' said Dirk quietly.

'Of course; how the deuce was I to know that you were going to be successful?' replied the other, thrown off his guard with his passion.

'You thought I was dead broke, didn't you?' continued Dirk urbanely.

'What else could I, or any other man of the world, have to think? Fortunes like yours don't drop from the skies every day.'

'No, they don't, Mr. Melgarf—Mr. Ridgeway.'

Ridgeway entered smilingly, upon which Mr. Melgarf sprang up with an oath, shaking his fist savagely.

'Why, that's the very fellow who went before me and bought your pictures up!'

'Exactly, Mr. Melgarf—he is my friend and secretary, and acted under my directions—I have the pictures all safely. Good morning, Mr. Melgarf.'

The old man rushed out of the room and out of the hotel with a fiery face, forgetting both his hat and his politeness in his exit.

CHAPTER V

AN APPROACHING MARRIAGE ANNOUNCED

IT was not until they had added 'Tibby,' the Applewait nurse, to their household, that they heard the particulars of Mrs. Davelock's mother's death; and then they learned how woesome it had been.

The mother, who had neglected all for her one son, who had been so afraid of seeing other people die, and so good towards all whom she liked, if vindictive towards those she hated, had died almost deserted by all she had clung to and depended upon. A hireling woman waited upon her at the last, one whom she had flouted and despised in her strong-minded days; while the rich daughters-in-law whom she had honoured so much held aloof, and the son she had worshipped so weakly was away from home at the last moment.

'It was woesome,' said the nurse, as she told it all over, 'to see her clinging to this despised one, crying out, "Don't go away, Jeannie—don't leave me by myself—stay beside me, for oh, I am frightened to be by myself."'

She had not asked for her daughter's presence, although she sometimes spoke kindly about her towards the last. In their occasional letters the relatives did not mention that she was sinking until it was too late for the daughter to go down to nurse her mother, even if she could have left her children or had money to have done so, which she hadn't and couldn't at the time. Perhaps they were all afraid that in her impulse she might have gone, so that the mourning-card was her first intimation of her mother's last serious illness. After which, the afflicted widower went about shaking his head solemnly over that ungrateful daughter of his, 'who had hastened on her mother's end by her wanton cruelty and neglect.'

Jeannie had held the wasted hand and smoothed the bed as the mother asked if her son had not yet returned. She asked for no one else, but passed the moments by moaning with weariness, or saying how afraid she was of it all. And then Jeannie grew also afraid to stay any longer when she saw death coming, and ran out of the house to call for the old husband to come. During her absence the *Mysterious Thing* which this grandmother feared so much came and discovered her all alone.

In the first impulse of her sympathy, and thinking how helpless and lonely this old man would be without his wife, for he was over seventy years of age, Mrs. Davelock had written, offering him a home with them.

'He will never live, Dirk, without mother, she was so much to him. They were so long together, that he is sure to break down shortly; and what sort of life will he have with these daughters-in-law.'

However, the old man did live, and, indeed, quite astonished his daughter at the sprightliness which he displayed. He declined the proffered home with severe contempt, and said that he had his sons and his sons' wives to comfort him, which were quite enough. Then other letters passed to and fro, in which the old man spoke of the trouble he had with dishonest housekeepers, and how he was looking about for a worthy woman, but no mention of regret about his dead partner.

Once he sent them on a letter enclosed from a Mrs. Grinder, who had been a former acquaintance of his wife's, and with whom he had opened a long-neglected correspondence. When they read this epistle they found that he had been in the habit of sending on all his daughter's letters for this woman's perusal, which made them both naturally indignant, particularly when they read in her reply a running string of covert insinuations against both Dirk and his wife, and a general tenor of malevolence, and the desire to stir up her father's anger against them.

Dirk re-enclosed the letter with one sentence across it, wondering that the father of his wife could show his letters to a stranger like this, who had shown herself to be in every word a mischief-maker.

He thought no more of the matter, or of the long silence

which followed, for although his wife had written at odd times no reply came, until one day there arrived one in the old familiar handwriting, the contents of which amused Dirk, while it filled his wife with indignation and dismay.

'My dear Daughter,—I had intended to reply to your last letters to me, but on and after *mature consideration*, and submitting copy to your brothers before I sent it to you and Davelock, I have been prevailed on, at their request, not to add further to the suffering, grief, and *punishment* which you have already been afflicted with till a later season, when you may be more able to hear some plain truths from your father regarding your respective management in your married life—this duty I shall not do *in anger*, *remember*, but in the same spirit of sorrow which so often prompted your devoted mother and myself to mourn over your past conduct.

'I refrain to say more at this time, but I shall now, and this is more particularly the object of this letter, *viz.* announce to you that in a fortnight's time I intend to be united in wedlock to your late mother's old and *justly dear*, *respected* friend, Sophia Trinity (Mrs. Grinder). Our respective marriage-contracts were legally made and signed about one month ago, in which my estate reverts to my children at my demise; while in her case her estate reverts to her people—myself being a life-renter, etc.

'Trusting that the above announcement will meet the approval of you both,—I am, your affectionate father.'

It was magnificently worded, if a little ponderous, and as if he had been studying the way they arrange these things in Gaboriau and Du Boisgobey's romances; in fact it smacked altogether of the *noblesse oblige* old *régime* style, and made Dirk think of his château in France.

'Ho! ho! ho!' laughed Dirk with his most Mephistophelian laugh. 'It is superb!'

'Oh! the shameless wretch,' sobbed his wife, 'and my mother not eight months gone, and he over seventy! It is horrible!'

'The way of this merry world, my dear, that is all.'

CHAPTER VI

MESSRS. GRABBLESON AND CO. ONCE MORE

DIRK DAVELOCK, now that he did not require it, was as eagerly sought after by editors for articles as Gladstone was in his day. Half-yearlies, quarterlies, monthlies, and weeklies, all united in craving something from his talented pen, no matter what, with which to grace their hot-pressed pages.

Amongst other recognitions to his greatness he received an invitation to dinner at the private palace of Mr. Grabbleson, 'just to have a friendly, quiet talk over business.'

Dirk had so long brooded upon this quiet, friendly talk that he could not help accepting it when it came, although he had no need now to clear himself in the estimation of this city magnate, for they were rushing out his formerly despised sketches with flaring posters. Still it had become a kind of monomania with him, and which he could not get rid of until the long-sought-for interview came off. Therefore on the evening appointed he drove down, taking his secretary with him.

'I feel nervous, Ridgeway, over this job—the force of old habit, I suppose—and I hope you'll back me up.'

'There's no need of any backing-up nor nervousness. The old fox wants you drawn in as a shareholder; they require fresh blood at present in that establishment, so you won't have to grumble at your reception.'

'Well, I wouldn't mind putting in fifty thousand for the pleasure of turning that little tyrant, Moloch, out of the post he disgraces, for my own revenge and the sake of other unfortunates.'

'Hint at half that amount to-night, and he will discharge

the whole gang of them, and let you select a fresh lot, if you are inclined.'

'No! I only want to get at Moloch. My other enemy is out already; the man with the hoof and crutch, you know; the man I cut the other night.'

'Yes, I think you have finished up his moral career by that public scowl of yours. I haven't seen him anywhere since.'

'Ridgeway!' exclaimed Dirk, 'I am about sick of this sham life, where one can only socially cut an enemy instead of scalping him. It seems but a paltry revenge when one compares it with the mighty wrongs.'

'It may seem so, but it isn't for all that. When the savage scalps his man, he settles his misery at once and for ever, but the social flaying lasts longer, and hurts much worse.'

'That may be true, but it doesn't look like fair fighting, and doesn't seem to give half so much satisfaction,' returned Dirk moodily as they drove on.

It was a splendid house, a splendid dinner, and as Dirk expected it to be, quite a private affair; only the members of Mr. Grabbleson's family were present, who, like the host, were very gracious to both Dirk and his secretary. But Ridgeway could stand a lot of spoiling, as he had done of adversity, without losing his head.

After dinner, while the gentlemen sat over their wine, Mr. Grabbleson broke the ice blandly. Could this genial gentleman be the same man who had so overawed Dirk in the past?

'Our literary editor has only lately informed me, Mr. Davelock, that you have had some cause to complain about your treatment at our hands in your last transaction with us?'

'Yes,' replied Dirk, 'I had what I thought considerable cause for complaint.'

'Of me, my dear fellow?' Mr. Grabbleson threw out both hands, and so exposed his manly chest.

'No, not exactly of you, Mr. Grabbleson.'

'Then, why not come to me with your grievance?'

'I think, on the whole, that I wrote to you about fifty letters and had about fifty replies, in response to my applications for an interview, refusing it, and referring me to Mr. Moloch.'

'I was not aware of it,' answered Mr. Grabbleson, with a fine and open candour which made Dirk gasp with admiration. He recalled all the contemptuous terms which had been used in these refusals. Certainly, they had all been indited by clerks for the principal. He thought for a moment, filled his glass again, and took a few puffs of his cigar, while Ridgeway sat silently looking along his nose at the wreaths of smoke which he was trying to form into complete circles, without exhibiting a sign that he heard anything of their conversation. He sat simply expressionless, without attempting to back up his friend and employer.

At last Dirk spoke, his voice a little husky at first, but gradually clearing as he went on, until it rang out like a silver bell.

'Mr. Grabbleson, I will give you the benefit of the doubt, and conclude that you do not know what is going on in your vast establishment between your editors and the authors and artists which they employ. But all I have to say is, that you ought to know, if you don't.'

Mr. Grabbleson smiled sadly as he replied—

'How can I, my friend, how can I? They have all their departments, for which they are responsible, as I am for mine, to the shareholders. Now, if you were a shareholder to—ah—a respectable extent, I could make you a director, and then you would have a voice in the matter as well as I have.'

'What would you call a respectable extent?' inquired Dirk calmly.

'Say eight or ten thousand pounds' worth of shares,' suggested the manager, feeling his way softly.

'Well, suppose I put fifty thou——'

'Twenty-five, I think you mean,' interrupted Ridgeway softly, while Mr. Grabbleson gave him a malevolent glance.

'No, Jack, it 's worth fifty thousand,' replied Dirk, striking his chest energetically as he spoke.

'Suppose I put fifty thousand pounds into your firm to-morrow, Mr. Grabbleson, what would you do?'

'Do?—discharge my art editor on the spot—post it off at once to your dictation before we join the ladies, and—blast him everywhere. Do?—I 'd make the dirty little beggar starve, that 's what I 'd do.'

Mr. Grabbleson's face was purple with emotion as he filled up and gulped down a glass of sherry.

'Then, Mr. Grabbleson, we may as well go to your library, and I'll fill in a cheque for my shares before we join the ladies. Don't bother about Moloch afterwards, his discharge will satisfy me—quite.'

'Will you be our art editor, Mr. Davelock? You are well fitted for the post, and——'

'No, Mr. Grabbleson, I am like Mr. Moloch, about the worst man your company could appoint, for I believe in my own style, and I fear I might degenerate into a tyrant.'

'Could you suggest one for us?'

'Well, here's my friend Ridgeway would do, as he is a lover of nature and justice, but knows nothing of art.'

'No, Mr. Davelock, I won't, even for you,' hastily responded Ridgeway, getting up from his seat. 'I've too much self-respect to be an art editor.'

'Then what am I to do?' asked Mr. Grabbleson helplessly.

'Oh! look out for some one who has a taste for art in general, but cannot draw a line; that is the man for your post. There are plenty lovers of the beautiful about.'

They were all on their feet now and moving towards the library.

'Twenty-five would have done the job,' muttered Ridgeway in Dirk's ear with reproach.

'No, Jack, it was worth fifty, and I never grudge my price when I want a real pleasure—I get so few.'

CHAPTER VII

RIDGEWAY TAKES HIS LEAVE

JACK RIDGEWAY, the secretary, seemed to have a wonderful power of divining just the right letter from the heap which should be read and answered first. He got through his work amazingly quickly, and Dirk found that the letters which he mostly placed before him were appeals to his charity. Business letters, such as new companies wanting chairmen, good schemes which were proposed for his consideration, or work offered from the magazines or papers, he hardly ever showed Dirk, but answered them himself.

Charitable institutions and letters from rectors, asking for gifts to be placed at their disposal, he would answer almost rudely with a curt refusal, so that Dirk Davelock's name was never seen heading the subscription list of their bombastic circulars. 'They have all plenty of Pharisees who cannot afford to keep their names back in the way of business from their circulars, but must give as an advertisement,' he used to say; 'but you can afford to be contemned, for you have stood very close to God, and are independent of man.' Or, while reading over some such exhibition of overweening conceit as this in some of the parish appeals: 'Since I know that indiscriminate charity is as great a curse as real charity is a blessing, I have felt it to be my duty (this from the vicar) to impose upon myself the not very popular and decidedly onerous work of personally investigating every case before granting any help whatever. If, therefore, instead of giving on representations, which are frequently the reverse of true, you will place your gifts at *my* disposal, the *real* deserving poor will get more.'

When he read these pompous circulars over, his sensitive lips would curl with fine scorn, and his grey eyes would light

up, so as to transform the commonplace, weather-beaten face into something almost beautiful, in its stern contempt, as he would say to his employer—

'What can this arrogant pastor know of the real wants of the needy or the poor who are about him constantly, more than any of the others who have never been needy nor poor themselves? It is not *playing* at being a pauper which can make a man understand the wants and feelings of the pauper. How will he set to work, judging which are the most desperate, with his condescension, which drives back the really deserving, and brings forward only sycophants and liars? Ugh! I must go with my dog "Jumpo" for a walk; can you spare me for a night, sir?'

'Yes, Jack; or go with you if you like,' Dirk would reply, and then the pair would sally forth, with Mrs. Davelock sometimes with them, and 'Jumpo,' in search of adventures.

Sometimes they prowled along the streets, where they saw crowds of lovely young girls, or thickly painted women in the richest of costumes, being treated worse than the aboriginals treat their gins, by men in dress-suits, whom Dirk often met in society. Women in sealskin jackets, and plush or silk dresses of all shades, who, perhaps, had not tasted food for a couple of days, being bashed about with the silver-mounted canes of these gentlemanly protectors, because they dared to ask for 'Bovril' instead of brandy or champagne. Both Dirk and Ridgeway knew by experience, in spite of the paint, who were starving among these *undeserving* needy ones, and managed to get accosted by them, and give them enough to buy a feed. 'Jumpo,' also, like his master, in spite of his popularity in fashionable circles, seemed to feel always most at home amongst the *disreputable*.

'There is a woman over the way near yonder church who is famishing,' remarked Ridgeway one night as they prowled about. 'The policeman presently will take her up for being drunk and incapable, and she may die in her cell before morning. But I know from the manner in which she clings to the railings that it is hunger, not drink, that ails her; go over, sir, and accost her.'

The secretary had very keen eyes, and a way about him at times of commanding his master which delighted Dirk immensely. Now he went over and spoke to the woman, who

was clutching the church railings with gloved hands, and enveloped in a long plush jacket.

'Good evening,' he said, as he stood beside her.

'Good evening, dear,' she responded, and then, turning her head to look at him, she gave a sudden exclamation, and would have fallen, had he not caught her.

'Mr. Davelock!' she gasped in a faint voice. 'What are *you* doing here at this hour of night?' Then he saw that it was the pariah neighbour who had tried to comfort his wife on that awful night at Pearstone, and he rejoiced that he had found her at last.

Almost at the same moment that he made his discovery Ridgeway appeared with a cab. 'Lift her in quick, and drive to the nearest café.' There they learned that she was homeless; turned out of her lodgings a week before, for want of money; and for the past three days she had not tasted a morsel of solid food. It was such a common experience that they did not feel surprised. There she sat devouring the food as 'Jumpo' might have done (for he was a vulgar dog), with a dainty hat on, and veil half over her face, an amber plush jacket nearly down to her heels, the suggestion of a richly coloured skirt peeping under it, and charming little high-heeled shoes upon her feet. Yet with nothing else upon her, for she had pawned the different articles of underclothing by degrees.

Dirk carried her home to his wife, who took her in, clothed and fed her properly, and then let her go back to the life which she could not leave—without comment. She was a depraved woman in her tastes and could not be made respectable, but they took care after this that she never wanted food.

Sometimes they walked eastward, setting out with full pockets and coming back empty. They found no lack of subjects, and mostly unworthy ones. Men and women who would not have worked could they have got the chance, and who spent all that they earned in rum or gin, shivering and fasting against bill-hoardings, and suffering a misery which hell could not surpass, and which 'twopennyworth' alone could dissipate for a little. Hopeless, debased waifs they were, whom only death could relieve effectually.

'Give them enough for a drink,' said the secretary. 'It is better to them now than a blanket would be, except to pawn,

and no philanthropist would think it right to encourage them in their evil ways. It is only cynics as we are who can understand the boon a glass of spirits is to them in their lost estate.'

They visited night-refuges and open soup-kitchens, city mission-halls and salvation barracks; in these places Ridgeway did not suggest nor prompt anything.

'They are doing good, all of them, in their way,' he would remark absently. 'But they have plenty who are ready to give to them; your money is not particularly wanted there; you have work to do by yourself.'

Had he suffered more than Dirk that he seemed to know so much better what sorrow was?—Dirk could not tell, for his secretary was strangely reticent about his past as a continuation. He told bits now and then which proved that he had experienced each phase of life which they passed through together, and seemed to have no love of money for his own use, for he gave his quarterly salary all away during these night-walks before he began to draw upon Dirk's fund.

They lived up to their income in this way, for Dirk did not spend much money upon the claims of society. He grew sick of the perpetual sameness and dreariness of these drivings about, and the uniformity of these gatherings of the same sort of fashion-plate models, who did everything within a drawn line and called it 'good form.' The same surface-chatter about popular characters, popular books, or popular pictures, with an under-current of duplicity, meanness, and viciousness. He felt that neither himself nor his wife could ever live up to this kind of life: it was too commonplace, uninteresting, and unprofitable.

At last, as winter was once more approaching, they made up their minds to leave it all. They would pay a visit to their Australian property. Therefore Dirk gave directions to Ridgeway to secure them berths on board the first out-going liner, and began their packing-up.

'Let us get out of this misery and monotony for a while, at any rate.'

'It will do you good,' remarked Ridgeway, as he helped them in their preparations. 'You will be the better of the change from dependence and wretchedness to sunshine and

independence; only come back again, for you are much wanted here.'

'It will do us all good,' replied Dirk with sparkling eyes, as he thought upon the glorious nights beneath the Southern Cross. 'For, of course, you have taken your cabin on board also.'

'No,' replied the secretary quietly.

'Why?' asked both Dirk and his wife, astonished.

'Because I dare not leave Metaltown at this time; I have other work to do.'

'And are we going to lose you?' cried Dirk, with sorrow and dismay in his tones, which his wife echoed. It was not until now that he comprehended how closely this man had crept into his heart. How lonely it would be for them without hearing his quiet, blunt voice, or seeing those grave, grey eyes, which made that common-looking, scarred face look so noble and knight-like; this their first and only friend.

'Yes, for a time,' he replied, with a smile so sad that the tears gushed from their eyes. 'It is needful for both you and myself that we should part for a time, but I shall come to you again if ever you require me.'

If ever! did they not require him always. Was his friendship not more to them than all the dust and dross which the world prized so highly?

It was a foggy night in November, and the three of them were taking their last walk together through the streets of Metaltown, for to-morrow they were to go aboard. Dirk had taken it for granted that his friend had arranged his own passage also, as he had left him the task to see to.

A thick, yellow fog hung closely about them and made the streets appear to be deserted. They had come to an abrupt stop near a lamp-post, while its rays struggled through the fog with a sickly radiance, which just let them see each other indistinctly where they stood, and no more. At their feet waited 'Jumpo' for them to go on again, shivering with the damp and cold. Dirk noticed that this night the mongrel was without its collar. Ridgeway had taken it off before they left the hotel.

'You can do without me now, for you have been tried by fire and temptation, and are nearly purified—the rest will come to you in God's own time. Farewell! Farewell!'

Both Dirk and his wife shivered with pain and hung their heads with bitterness. But as the last word sounded faintly they looked up simultaneously to call him back, only to discover that they were alone in that wintry mist. Both 'Jumpo' and his master had vanished.

'Ah, Ridgeway, Ridgeway, come back, my friend, my friend!' cried Dirk, stretching out his arms wildly in his anguish, while his wife clung to the iron lamp-post. But no answer came to them through the gloom.

And yet it felt to Dirk as if a soft little hand was stroking his hair so gently, so lovingly, while a voice which he could never forget whispered in his ear, or from out of his heart, 'Papa, papa.' And the mother, as she clung there to the iron post, felt the contact of a pair of warm spirit-lips upon her own bloodless ones, while she heard that full cry of boundless affection: 'My darling!'

CHAPTER VIII

MOLOCH DOWN

FOR a time neither of them moved nor spoke to one another, as they listened with charged hearts for more of the blessed sounds; then Dirk drew his wife's arm into his and silently they made their way towards the hotel.

Along dimly lighted streets they staggered, while other half-blinded passengers fell against them, apologising or cursing them for their stupidity, according to the temper or disposition of the people whom they knocked against. Down through square and street they struggled, until they came to the quieter part near their hotel.

Here they paused for a moment to recover breath and look at the productions of one of those pavement-artists who had chosen this spot as his studio, and made quite a brilliant display of tallow candles along the wall, one at the top of each picture.

Dirk stooped to look at them, while he opened his overcoat to get some money from his trousers' pockets. He could see the rimless hat of the artist, placed handy for the pennies to be dropped into; but he could not see the artist himself, for he stood shivering against the wall in the obscurity; only the under portion of a ragged pair of trousers and dilapidated boots could be traced.

Dirk called his wife's attention to the art productions in crayon, which were uncommonly well drawn and softly shaded. Surely the artist must have had a better training than these street-artists mostly get.

'Very pretty,' Mrs. Davelock said, as he flung a silver piece into the hat.

'Thank you kindly.'

Ha! what was it in the voice of this street-artist which struck upon Dirk's memory with a hateful clang? Quickly he stooped, and, lifting up one of the candles, thrust it before the other's face.

Yes, there stood the mighty Moloch in a seamless coat, without vest, and with unwashed face, blue and pinched with cold and want, while his protruding rabbit-like teeth chattered like castanets. Moloch fallen as low as idol or man could fall!

At the sight of the little miserable wretch, blinking at the light, and unaware of who was looking at him, all desire for revenge, and all hatred died out of Dirk's nature, as he laid down the candle and turned towards his wife, who was waiting on him and wondering at his behaviour.

'What is it, Dirk?'

'Nelly,' whispered Dirk softly in her ear, 'there stands our mortal enemy in as bad a plight as ever we were once. Shall we help him, or treat him as he treated us?'

Mrs. Davelock stood for a moment with a hard, unrelenting expression upon her grief-scarred face. Indeed, she had taken her husband's arm as if to draw him away and leave the wretch to his just doom. Then it seemed as if she heard a gentle sigh at her side furthest from Dirk, and at the fancied sound all her better nature prevailed.

'No, Dirk, I cannot leave *even him* to suffer as we suffered.'

'My darling!'

Was it her husband's or her Katie's voice which said the words.

'You speak to him,' whispered Davelock, 'and ask him if he is hungry.'

And then she went over, and in a tremulous voice began to question their enemy.

'There are few people abroad to-night—have you earned much to-day?'

'Only what that gentleman has given me,' replied Moloch in a husky tone.

'Are you hungry?'

'Yes; I have not broken bread for two days.'

'Poor fellow!' She remembered that they had starved for four days.

'Have you any little ones?'

'Yes, I have three at home.'

'Then you have lost some, have you?'

'No, madam, not yet; but I have one very ill.'

'A boy or girl?'

'My youngest daughter.'

'Ah! what is wrong with her?'

'Neglect. If I could get her plenty to eat and drink, the doctor says she will mend, but if not, she will die.'

'Then let her live. Come, follow us!'

The pavement-artist clutched at his rimless hat eagerly, and left the candles standing, while he slouched after them along the pavement into the hotel, and up to their own private sitting-room.

'Take a seat while I order dinner,' said Mrs. Davelock, as she left the room, and shut the door behind her gently.

Then for the first time the tattered wretch saw the face of the man he had followed, and, crouching down, with his bony hands in front of his eyes, he shrieked out—

'Dirk Davelock!'

'Yes, Mr. Moloch,' answered Dirk quietly; 'sit down. I have not brought you here to reproach you with the past, but to help you if I can to save the lives of your little ones.

'O God, but this is coals of fire upon my head!' cried out the wretched man, sinking on the carpet in a fit of hysterical sobbing, and hiding his shame-stricken face.

'Then I have taken them red-hot out of my heart to do so,' answered Dirk. 'But I don't want to give you charity. I will give you a commission, if you like to execute it for me, and pay you something in advance, which may be of service to you—two pictures in water-colour. Will you do so?'

'Yes, sir, with pleasure and gratitude!' responded the little man, recovering himself. 'What subjects would you like—a milkmaid with her pail, or a young girl in a hay-field?'

'Neither of these,' said Dirk, smiling. 'I will give you a mythical and allegorical subject, which may make your name if you do them with spirit—companion pictures. I would like you to compose for me two representations of the

Phœnician god, Baal, and give me something nice at your own price. The one to be "Baal" in all his glory, with the little children being sacrificed to him in the flames, and the other companion picture—"Baal" fallen, and lying amongst the ashes.'

THE END

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